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FLYNG SNAKE

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Raccoons in Britain . Blue Cat—a poem . Phantom Boats . Dreams and Visions . New Species in Atlantic . Mystery Cat of St Albans . Enigmatic British Birds . And More!

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Established by Richard Muirhead aka Dr Devo in 2011

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Dr Devo`s Diary

"For I pray God for the introduction of new creatures into this island. For I pray God for the ostriches of Salisbury Plain, the bea-vers of the Medway and silver fish of Thames." *Christopher Smart `Rejoice in the Lamb`. Poet, naturalist, lunatic (1722-1771)*

Wey hey hey! Flying Snake is back with an action packed collection of cryptozoological and Fortean goodies to distract your attention from the ravages of Covid 19 and the tedium of lockdown, although to be honest I have *not* been bored, I spend most of the time either reading (as in a biography of Thomas Hardy or back issues of Fortean Times,etc) In the UK as I write this during the second week of February we are enduring our third lockdown and although I like to keep politics out of Dr Devo`s diary I do wish members of the government would stop saying such-and-such a situation is going to ease on a certain fixed date when it is so difficult to predict how humans and the virus are going to behave. But enough of my rant! In this issue of Flying Snake(it`s hard to believe the magazine is ten years old this April!) we have Time and Death by Loes Modderman and another essay on the basilisk, one of my favourite cryptids. Regarding time and death, I have a personal interest in this because according to my older brother, when my dad died in 1993, his watch stopped at exactly the minute he died. I have reproduced Dr Karl Shuker`s blog on the Steller`s Sea Cow skin I featured in Flying Snake #7. Karl "de-bunked" the case, it wasn`t a Sea Cow skin after all, but no hard feelings! Richard George is here again with a story of a big cat lurking the environs of his native St Albans in Hertfordshire and also he has done some research on raccoons in Britain. I am also glad to present another instalment of old stories from Fate magazine. Last but not least a very big thanks to Maria José de la Peña for drawings on the front and back cover of this issue, she did them many years ago.

Blue Cat A Poem

I wrote this poem in 1998 or 1999 whilst a patient in a Macclesfield psychiatric unit:

I woke with the image of a skinny dark blue cat inexplicably haunting me,

Now in the rain soaked street, with evacuees,

Now with me throughout the day between television, courtyard, the medication queue

Then art therapy. Slowly a meaning clustered around its blueness

Like sperm around an egg: a new creation in my soul.

A revelation, the unveiling of something half remembered,

The appearance of a blue cat was a prognostication of World War Two, like singing mice to Native Americans,for their conflicts.

Cheshire`s aloof Cat did not mean grinning, but scowling

And bombs and air raid shelters and rations.

Foolishly I told nurse all about it, my deep fantasies were lanced-With—

"Dear,dear Richard,fifty more

Milligrams of lithium for you I`m afraid!"

She announced, patting my head patronisingly.

ANATOMY OF A CAT FLAP: THE "BIG CAT OF ST. ALBANS"

by RICHARD GEORGE

"I WILL talk about cats ! There are so many cats !"

A character in *The Apes of God*, by Wyndham Lewis

Big cat sightings in Hertfordshire as a whole are numerous, and beyond the scope of this article. I concentrate here on the Big Cat of St. Albans and its antecedents. This strand of the local press, which began around 2016, owes much to Franki Berry and other journalists at the *Herts Advertiser*, who deserve the Order of Heuvelmans Second Class.

But ABCs in Hertfordshire date back a long way, beyond the Dangerous Wild Animals Act of 1976. In July 1971, at Plaistows Farm near Potters Crouch, which is a hamlet not a sexual position, a two foot tall grey cat was sighted (1). In 2002, the couple who run the pub at Potters Crouch saw a "black leopard", and the woman said she had seen a similar creature a decade earlier (2). And in October 2005, a "puma or mountain lion" was observed outside Harpenden (2).

In April 2008, the *St Albans and Harpenden Review* reported a black panther at Chiswell Green, an outlying suburb of St Albans not far from Potters Crouch (3). This featured in one of Fortean Times's ABC round-ups, and I wrote them a letter (unpublished) about the location. The terrain here is wooded and undulating, and surprisingly remote in spots, despite being intersected by no less than three motorways – the M1, the M10 and the M25. Suitable for ABCs, then, and open to sightings from passing cars, and even that Holy Grail – roadkill. (We may have had this already – bear with me). It's also bounded by three urban sprawls – St. Albans, Watford and Hemel Hempstead – so it could have been a dumping ground for unwanted pets from quite

a large area.

Then there is the curious case of the Beast of Bedmond. (Ah, alliteration !) Bedmond is the largest village in the Potters Crouch Triangle, best known for its peculiar corrugated iron Victorian chapel or "tin tabernacle". In January 2010, Hebridean sheep were found mauled there. ABC expert Danny Nineham concluded the culprit was not a big cat but a large dog (4, 5). But later that year, in August, Mark Palman saw a large black feline in Leavesden Country Park, not far away (6). Stephen Liddell describes the Bedmond area, with photographs, in his blog of February 2013, which is worth looking at, as it gives a good sense of these fields and lanes (7). He claims the "Beast of Bedmond" is "sometimes seen from the M25", but without references. Now to the St. Albans "cat flap" proper. A "large, sandy-coloured cat" was seen near Oaklands College in January 2017. In May that year, a "big, sleek, cream" cat was observed by a driver off one of our main thoroughfares, Hatfield Road. And a month later a "burly, muscular" cat (colour unspecified) was seen near Redbourn. In January 2017, near Wheathampstead, the mutilated carcass of a deer had been discovered, and in June 2017, in a bunker at nearby Aldwickbury golf course, incriminating paw prints were found. I am assuming this wasn't the Argentinian pro Eduardo Romero, known for his elegant prowl as "El Gato" (The Cat).

The best-known ABC sighting in this group is, ironically, the least convincing. At 4.30 one morning around the 2017 summer solstice, a taxi driver near Napsbury took dashcam footage of… what looks to me like some one's big rough tough old ginger tom cat with a stripy tail. The *Daily Mail* took this up, and the *Sun* combined it with the deer mute in the ludicrous headline BRIT BIG CAT EATS BAMBI. Arsenal have their training ground at London Colney nearby, so maybe the tom cat was an Arsenal supporter.

Unfortunately all this obscured a very good sighting from Chiltern Green, near Luton Airport, in October 2016, where a jogger encountered a black panther (8). I grew up very near there, and for ABCs this countryside is like the Potters Crouch Triangle, but better –

– hilly, isolated, and with many woodland edges. Another jogger met a black ABC on the Alban Way cycle track between St. Albans and Hatfield in June 2017 (9). Was this the same creature ?

Sightings of sandy coloured cats continued. In August 2017 one was seen, again at first light, in Jersey Farm, an outlying estate (10), and in September 2017 a "cougar" was reported in Fleetville, much nearer the city centre. Then, the following month, a man called Gavin Wybrow may have come across something of great importance to British cryptozoology.

On an M25 slip road at Junction 24 near Potters Bar, he noticed what he described as "a huge mass of roadkill" (11), which he said resembled a puma. So why did no one pursue the possibility of samples ? How guttingly disappointing. Although this is not near St. Albans (it's over towards Enfield Chase), he claimed to have seen a similar brownish ABC near Chiswell Green. The M1 and M25 meet in open fields thereabouts at Junction 21, in what always reminds me of Spaghetti Junction in miniature. Is this where we shall find, pancaked into the road, our type specimen ? Remember it – M25, Junction 21. 2018 was a quieter year, but there was one very interesting sighting – a "grey lynx" spotted by a schoolboy near Chiswell Green, close to where the grey cat of 1971 had been seen. "Grey lynx" reminds me of a bobcat. Had bobcats been living in the area between 1971 and 2018 ?

2019 saw two pieces of visual evidence, neither of which stood up to much scrutiny. In January, a brief film clip emerged of a "mysterious creature" in central St. Albans, literally a street away from where I live. The animal, described by a witness as "disoriented and confused", was obviously a pitifully ill fox that had lost all its fur to sarcoptic mange. Its hairless tail did look very weird: Basil, minus his brush, turns into a chupacabras. Then, in March, footage emerged from a St. Albans garden, and was taken up by the *Daily Mail* and *Fortean Times* (I sent FT the clipping). It is probably one of those Savannah domestic cats descended from servals (12).

Finally, in November 2020, a pale brown feline was filmed in a garden near Oaklands College. It was very clear footage – clear enough to show this was definitely a Savannah mega-mog. And that's all, folks – we're up to date.

St. Albans and its surrounding countryside are, as I hope I've demonstrated, a happy hunting ground for Alien Big Cat enthusiasts. It also boasts no less than 44 pubs, not including the excellent hostelries at Bedmond and Potters Crouch. Sceptics may suggest the number of ABC sightings are proportionate to the number of alcohol outlets. But on a more sombre note, many of these taverns may not survive the latest Covid lockdown. Speaking of which, with fewer people out of doors, cryptids may become bolder. But will there be fewer witnesses to see them ? I opened this piece with a quote from a novel by Wyndham Lewis, who was not just a sabre-toothed satirist but also a major Modernist painter. Another, very different artist has a St. Albans connection – Louis Wain. He was the man who humanised cats, influenced the characters of Walt Disney, and did much for cat welfare. In his middle years, he began to lose his sanity, and his cats mutated accordingly, taking on fixed, sinister grins. By 1924 he was convinced spirits of the dead were injecting him with electricity, and he was institutionalised. He ended up at Napsbury Hospital, a stone's throw from where the BRIT BIG CAT EATS BAMBI shot was taken. Just as Owlman has a Max Ernst connection (13), do these bizarre, marginal, paradoxical cats relate in some way to Louis Wain ? After all, ABC witnesses have to put up with being told "You're crazy". Louis Wain died peacefully in Napsbury Hospital in 1939, and the site is now a housing development.

REFERENCES

Note: I have not included all provenances. Where there is no reference it should be assumed the story first appeared in the *Herts Advertiser*.

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(4) watfordobserver.co.uk/news/4864637.beast-of-bedmond-strikes

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(12) *Fortean Times* 379.4 (13) Jonathan Downes, *The Owlman and Others* (1998), p.202f.

(13) Jonathan Downes, *The Owlman and Others* (1998), p.202f.

Raccoons in Britain By Richard George

(Assuming *procyon lotor*, not "raccoon dog")

Part One

theguardian.com/environment/2006/sep/18 published "Breakdown of complaints to the RSPCA and collections" between Jan 2000 and Dec 2003. This included 17 raccoons.

BBC website 17.9.2008

R. seen by motorists near Knowle, Devon

In same piece: one captured near Penzance Nov 2003, and two escaped from Combe Martin wildlife park, Cornwall Apr 2004.

Guardian website 31.8.2010

Dog near Barnsley dies of "Coonhound paralysis" after bite from r.

P. Boydell wrote an article about this in Vet.Rec. 2010; 167(9):351.

BBC website 3.9.2012, later Burnham and Highbridge Weekly News, Somerset

"Badger" in couple's garden in Taunton turned out to be r.

Daily Mail website 3.10.2013

R. stows away from Iowa to Canada to Liverpool to Ebbw Vale

BBC website 13.9.2014 had article "Aliens among us: what strange species are making Britain home ?" This refers to r. sightings from East Sussex and Perthshire, both 2013.

Independent website 28.1.2014

R. escapes from zoo in Somerset

Belfast Telegraph 22.10.2014

Escapee from pet shop in Ballymena found in Ballycastle

Sky News website 1.4.2016 [date ?????]

Escaped r, caught on camera near Garve, Easter Ross.

Also on Daily Express website 2.4.2016 and Scotsman 6.4.2016. I assume these later ones mean it wasn't an April Fool.

Both Sky and Scotsman claimed there had been r. sightings in UK "since the 1970s", but without references

BBC website 13.5.2017, Hunts Post 24.3.2017

R. with French microchip found on shed roof at Broughton, Cambs.

Daily Mail website 31.8.2017

Two r. escape from Tropiquaria in Somerset

BBC and Liverpool Echo 3.8.2018

R. found in garden

Part Two

On NBN Atlas (species.nbnatlas.org/search/?q=raccoon) -

nine records.

18.3.2016 Alladale Estate, Scotland

17.3.2016 Torr Beith, Scotland

10.3.2016 Alladale Estate above

These possibly the same r. ! Could this be the Garve one above ?

I don't know how mobile they are.

12.1.2016 White Bog, Scotland

17.1.2015 near Sunderland, England

29.10.2014 same location (same one ?)

Oct 2015 Kilmuir, Scotland

2005 North Kessock, Scotland ("probable wildlife park escape")

Oct 2017 Durness, near Cape Wrath, far north of Scotland ("Credible reports of a second nearby")

If they are breeding, it's most likely to be in Scotland or West Country (greatest concentration of sightings).

Part Three

Going back to last millennium… Not much success.

The Alien Invaders website writes (hows.org.uk/inter/birds/exotics/gbm.htm):

"I have had little success in finding out about r. in the UK. There have been many escapes and rumours of breeding. The only confirmed breeding was in South Yorkshire and Somerset [no references]".

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The Bords in *Modern Mysteries of Britain* (1987) write (p.78) that one was found near Daventry in 1976 (Sunday Mirror 21.11.1976, Fortean Times 19, page 11) and another in North Wales in 1983 (Cambrian News 28.10.83, Sunday Express 30.10.83). They also write that r. have become feral in Kent, but with no reference to back it up.

Did *Animals and Men* do a piece on r. in the UK ? If so I can't access it at the moment.

+

More pre-21st Century sightings

The Stroud Journal January 30th 1886

WILD ANIMALS OF THE DISTRICT.

[THE WILD CAT.]

The wild cat of England and Scotland is now supposed to be nearly extinct. It seems certain that in days gone by this species was well represented in our neighbourhood; and we have strong reason for thinking that individuals of the race may yet exist in the more lonely and secluded parts of our woods. The fact of racoons having lived for years near Stroud, and of their discovery only after they had died natural deaths should afford some justification for such an opinion; the racoon being an extraordinary looking animal, and the wild cat a close resemblance of the domestic species. The original

© British Newspaper Archive

The Yorkshire Post July 10th 1933

RACCOON'S RAIDS

Found and Shot in Hen Run Near Preston

What is believed to be a raccoon has been shot at Lostock Hall, near Preston.

After finding some hens mutilated and dead in one of his pens, Mr. Smith, of Waterpool Lane, Lostock Hall, kept a watch with two companions, and near midnight the animal was seen in a pen.

After one shot had wounded it, the animal sprang at its attackers, one of whom shot it down as it was in the air. On examination it was found to be a male, 38in. long, and 11lb. in weight. How it came to be in the locality is a mystery.

© British Newspaper Archive

The Yorkshire Evening Post April 8th 1937

LIGHT ON ZOO RACCOON MYSTERY

An April shower descended upon the Zoological Gardens yesterday morning, and a painter, his work interrupted by the rain, glanced at the sky to estimate its probable duration, and (says the London correspondent of the "Manchester Guardian") observed on the roof of the parrot-house what, at first sight he took to be an enormous cat greedily lapping the rain that ran down the tiles.

A second glance showed the animal to be a black raccoon, and thus light was shed on a mystery which has baffled the authorities of the Zoo for five weeks, for it is five weeks since their two valuable black raccoons disappeared.

When no trace was found of them either inside or outside the Zoo it was assumed that they had not escaped, but had been stolen.

GOOD WORK AMONG THE RATS

Now we know (the writer continues) that one of them has been living in the loft over the parrot-house, which he must have reached by climbing over the wire of the outer aviaries, and there is renewed hope of finding the other as well.

No doubt the raccoon has been doing good work among the rats—of which the parrot-house holds too many. And no doubt, in the dry quarter of the loft, he became very thirsty, so that the sound and smell of falling rain drew him out just at the moment when the painter was moved to study the sky.

He has been recaptured, and the abandoned search will be resumed in the hope that the other of the pair may yet be found.

© British Newspaper Archive

Daily Mirror February 18th 1988

Store's raccoon riddle

A GUARD checking a superstore yesterday came face to face with an intruder — a raccoon. Staff at Asda in Watford, Herts, named the 2ft animal Rocky while RSPCA officers puzzled over where he came from.

"We've no idea how he got there," said an Asda spokesman. "He seemed bothered `having his peace disturbed but at least he wasn `ar the food."

© British Newspaper Archive

Amazing Phantom Boats

Ulrich Magin

How come that objects which – according to conventional wisdom – do not possess of a soul can appear as ghosts? I know this is an old, almost cliché question, and has already been often asked. But think of ghost ships and phantom boats. Do they reflect back to a time when the dead had to cross a Styxian river to reach the realm of the beyond, or when kings like Egypt's pharaohs sailed the night sky in their sun boats? Or even father back, to the stone age when people went on their last voyage to the otherworld in a dugout-like log coffin?

Phantom boats have been interpreted differently by forteans. Observed in a Scottish loch, they tend to be regarded as thinly veiled reports of lake monsters. Spotted in the sea, they will be taken for underwater UFOs. And of course, they can be explained as ghosts. But – of what?

Phantom boats, therefore, are an exiting and multifaceted phenomenon. One of the most well-known examples comes from New Zealand. It is the "phantom canoe" seen close to the eruption of the Tarawera volcano in 1886, and it was taken as a portend.

However, the first New Zealand report I came upon dates ten years before:

'A NEW ZEALAND FLYING DUTCHMAN.— The Picton *Press* publishes the following story which we give for what it is worth : — " Some short time after last Christmas, two poor fellows named Charles Nicholson and James Broadbent, were drowned in a. gale in Nydia Bay. Since that time a most curious phenomenon appears over the spot where the boat capsized. Sometimes in the morning, and sometimes in the evening, in all weathers, clear or cloudy, a seeming boat will appear, as though it came up from the; sea, and will skim rapidly along backwards and forwards for a short time, and as suddenly disappear. Being in company with a gentleman from Havelock, yesterday morning, we were .talking about this (as it is called here) phantom boat. It was a fine clear evening— not a sign of a cloud, and we were looking towards the place, .when my companion suddenly called out, "There it is;" and sure enough there it was. It came up, as suddenly as a flash of lightning, and seemed going along most rapidly right over the spot

where the real boat went down. We both watched it for about three or four minutes, and it seemed as though a slight mist was gathering around it; and, as we, watched it, it vanished as suddenly as it came. It did not seem to go down, neither can I describe exactly how it went; but it, was clean gone in one moment. Many others besides ourselves saw it at the same time, from different parts of the bay, and it is seen very often, appearing and disappearing in a most mysterious manner, which has caused it to be called by the inhabitants of the bay "Charley Nicholson's Phantom Boat."' (1)

On 10 June 1886, more than thirty strong earthquakes hit the area at Rotorua on New Zealand's Northern Island. At 2 am in the morning, the largest quake was accompanied by a loud explosion, half an hour later, one of Mount Tarawera's three peaks erupted, and at 3.30 am, a pyroclastic surge destroyed almost everything within a four mile radius around the volcano. As news of the disaster reached the country's newspapers, readers learned that the catastrophe had be presaged by a strange omen:

'FOREWARNINGS OF DISASTER. The volcanic eruption is said to have been preceded a week ago by a tidal wave on Lake Tarawera, and the Maories were afraid to go up with their canoes. Another circumstance which increased their superstition was as follows: — Some tourists and natives were standing on the border of the Lake when a large war canoe is said to have appeared gliding along on the placid water, the Maories standing upright using their paddles. A native women who was with the tourists called to those in the canoe, but it suddenly disappeared from view, and was regarded by them as being a phantom canoe, an omen of the evil which has befallen their tribe. They are satisfied it was an apparition, as they have no war canoe. Tourists regard it in the same light as the phantom coach in London.' (2)

Yet the 19th century was a big time for science, and such a superstitious report could not be tolerated for long. Soon the first explanations were reported by the press:'The Phantom Canoe. A STRANGE STORY STRANGELY CONFIRMED. [SPECIAL TO THE "STAR."] WELLINGTON, June 14. Our special correspondent at Wellington writes: — You remember that in the first accounts of the Tarawera disaster, the story was told of a phantom canoe seen on Lake Tarawera by a party of tourists and Natives. I have seen some of the tourists who were present, and they have corroborated the story in most particulars.

They were on their way from Wairoa by boat to Rotomahana. The day was very bright and clear, not a cloud in the sky, or the least obscurity in the atmosphere. Presently they saw a canoe, with high ends, going along parallel to them, apparently racing, her crew standing up and paddling in the old Maori fashion. At first they counted eleven men in her, and afterwards not more than three. Their own rowers hailed the strangers several times, but there was no reply. The boats continued side by side until the tourists turned into the arm of the lake leading towards Rotomahana, when the stranger, keeping up Tarawera, was soon lost to view. This is slightly different from the "sudden disappearance" of the early account. My tourist friends thought nothing of the matter, except that they had an idea that the big canoe was part of the show; but observing the excitement of the Maori guides and rowers, and the effect the news of the canoe had on other Maoris, they made enquiries, and were informed that no such canoe as they described had ever been seen within the memory of the district. The oldest Maoris were very decidedly of that opinion, and Mr M'Rae, of the hotel at Wairoa, who has been seventeen years in the district, declared positively that he had never heard of or seen such a canoe. According to the description of these witnesses, whose competence I can vouch for, as they are personal friends of my own, the canoe was recognised by the Maoris and others as a war canoe. The party was on its way back from the Lakes, and had just reached Auckland when the eruption took place. "One of them mentioned the circumstance to the proprietor of one of the newspapers there, and thus the story found its way into print.

THE STORY is that the tohungas (priests) kept a war canoe stowed away in some creek, which was probably made tapu, in order to make portents on occasions of disturbance, such as took place not long before the great outburst, such as hearings of the waters of the lakes, and the sudden rising and falling of springs, appearance of new holes, and so forth.' (3)

These suspicions were soon confirmed:

'THE PHANTOM CANOE. THE TRUTH ABOUT THE APPARITION. (Otago Daily Times) Mr G. L. Sise, who has just returned to Dunedin from the Hot Springs District, was one of the party of tourists who encountered the "phantom canoe" on Lake Tarawera shortly before the eruption, and, in view of many extraordinary stories that have found publicity, it may be just as well to give an unvarnished

account of the apparition. Stripped of its adornments — adornments not supplied by the narrator— the tale told by Mr Sise is something as follows :— His party, composed of six Europeans and nine Maoris, started from Wairoa in a canoe at about 8 o'clock one fine morning to cross the lake to the terraces. When a little more than half way across another canoe emerged from the shore come distance to the northward, and kept a parallel course with them until a headland shut it from view. The strange craft might have been half a mile or so distant or possibly more, it is not easy to judge distance upon the water. Mr Sise thinks that about nine persons were counted in the "Phantom Canoe," not thirteen, and, as to their being "naked warriors" the craft was by no means near enough to ascertain whether they were clothed or not, and there was absolutely nothing *en evidence* to show that they were warriors. They might have been apple women or nurse girls. No warrior chief with feathers or anything else in his head gear was seen brandishing his spear in the prow of the boat, but three of the figures did rise to a standing posture after a while. Doubtless their reason for doing so was that they were tired of sitting down. The canoe was sufficiently close for Mr Sise to see the flash of the paddles, of which there were three on the side nearest him. She was certainly heading in the direction of the old Maori burial place at Mount Tarawera, and the Natives in the tourists' boat whistled and shouted to the ghostly paddlers, but received no answer. Their supernatural character was not, however, known to the Europeans at the time. It was only after landing that Mr Sise and his companions learned that they had been watching the movements of spirits as ghostly as Vanderdecker's crew, and spirits, too, with a fine muscular development, as was evidenced by their style of paddling. Had Mr Sise known at the time that the canoe and the rowers were things of the air — false creations, he would very probably have been alarmed. As he didn't know, he and his companions were as cool as when they emerged from their morning tub. But the natives were not, and thereby probably hangs the tale.Things were going very badly with the unfortunate Maoris about this time— some eight or nine days before the eruption. Lake Tarawera was rising and falling as it had never risen and fallen before within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, or its earliest ancestor. Typhoid fever had been about, and thirteen of the unlucky Natives had died within seven weeks. Moreover, among the deceased was an old and venerated chief whom they had of course kept above ground

in a state of putrescence, and over whose remains they had been holding a great tangi. They had an old woman too amongst them at Wairoa — an infernal character, skilled in the black art — by whose machinations the defunct chief had been called to his account. They had also among them a tohunga, or professional prophet, who had served his apprenticeship to the business and had been sent for specially to curse the witch who had killed the chief. He was a vigorous and proficient curser, and great results were expected from his efforts. In view of all these disturbing elements it is not surprising that Mr Sise and his companions found the poor Maoris at Wairoa greatly excited. Between present troubles and portents of greater troubles to come they were in a state of abject superstitious terror, and were prepared for anything marvellous, from a mermaid to a banshee. The boat in which they were traversing the lake was the boat of the dead and decaying chief, and on board was an ancient harridan who crooned dismally during the passage. This naturally did not improve matters, and the consequence was that by the time the terraces were reached they had arrived at the conclusion that the end of the world was at hand, and turned to the *pakehas* with the cheerful announcement. "We all die to-day." The only really peculiar feature about the incident according to Mr Sise's account is that the canoe seen was of a singular shape, raised at either end higher than usual, and it is asserted by both Europeans and Maoris that there is no such canoe on the lake. This is, undoubtedly odd, to say the least of it, and Mr Sise is inclined to the belief that it was a "got up arrangement" — a "put up job"— on the part of the tohunga, who was painfully aware that it was about time he did something for a living, and needed some unusual accessories to produce anything like a satisfactory effect upon the Maori public. An ethereal canoe, manned by phantoms is a very impressive apparition if viewed with due reverence, and in fact it should be part of the stock-in-trade of any properly regulated prophetic establishment. It is possible, therefore, that Mr Sise's surmise is correct. Whether correct or not, the bald facts in his narrative are as stated above.' (4)

The phantom canoe was not the only fortean event connected with the eruption. A ghost horse did also appear, and whether this was an instance of the "devil's footprints" in New Zealand or just a poor lost animal – who can say?

'THE PHANTOM HORSE. The writer of sketches of the New Wonderland in the *N. Z. Herald* contributes the following; — Everyone has heard of the phantom canoe which was seen on Lake Tarawera a few days before the eruption. I do not know whether this strange phenomenon came within the scope of the investigations instituted by the learned professors who were sent to the volcanic region, and I am ignorant as to whether they demolished it by the light of science, or treated it with contempt as the rum-inspired vision of a superstitions and not particularly sober race. But account for it as one may there can be no doubt whatever that a strange canoe, curiously constructed, differing from any canoe known to be on the lake, was seen gliding across its placid bosom propelled by a ghostly crow of ta tooed [sic] warriors. The historical Sophia, the female Washington of Maori veracity, told me she saw it and knew that it was an omen of coming trouble. On her return from that trip, almost the last; she ever made to her palace of delight, the White Terrace, she was sad and dejected. "Why so down in the mouth, Sophia ?" asked McRae, as he stood under his verandah at Wairoa. "Alas I" she answered, in a voice of sorrow, "I shall not make many more trips to the terraces." "Nonsense," said he. "Ah, you may laugh," said Sophia, "but I feel that something is going to happen— l know not what; but this I do know, I shall not go much oftener to the terraces." And so it proved to be. The eruption came and the terraces went. Sophia's occupation like Othello's was gone. The interest of this little story lies in its truth, which is stranger than fiction. But the phantom canoe has been matched by the phantom horse. No mortal eye hath looked upon this ghostly steed, yet its footprints are plainly visible on the surface of the mud which covers the buried village of Te Ariki, and on the slippery slopes of Tarawera, showing that it must have crossed the chasm in the mountain, finding a precarious footing on the narrow rides over which Professor Thomas and Lundius his guide passed. Whence it came, whither it has gone no one can say. On our way down Tarawera, and when near the foot of the range, we noticed its tracks with as much astonishment as Robinson Crusoe when he first discovered a strange footprint in the sand. Poor brute! Starving for want of food, shivering with cold, and shaking with fear, its sufferings muse have been intent, How it came to be in such a position is a puzzle. For miles and miles there is not a green blade or bit of food for living thing. All is a steaming waste.

The air is moist with the great clouds of vapor given off by the volcanoes, the ground is torn and rent, blown out in all directions, and piled high with mud; and the never-ceasing roar of the escaping steam, the low rumbling of the pent-up forces, deep down in the earth, striving, as it were, to burst asunder their subterranean prison — for ever and ever, day and night, these sounds ere heard. And it was in such a scene — strange and terrifying — that this poor lost animal had been for days, it may be, wandering aimlessly about, shivering, starving, stupefied, till death had mercifully put an end to its sufferings. But, as in life, so in death, no one has been it, The sekeleton [sic] of the phantom horse has yet to be discovered."' (5)

Sophia, the native guide, died in 1911: 'DEATH OF GUIDE SOPHIA ROTORUA, 4th December. The well-known guide Sophia died at Whakarewarewa early thus morning. She was the daughter of a British officer named Grey, her mother being of the Ngatiruanui tribe, Taranaki. She was born either in Taranaki or at the Bay of Islands about eighty-five years ago. She went through the awful experience at the time of the Tarawara eruption, on 10th June, 1886, her whare at the burned village of Wairoa affording shelter to some forty Natives. Sophia guided the last party who viewed the famous pink and white terraces, and she saw the phantom canoe that the Natives regarded ac a warning of disaster. Sophia, who was educated at the Mission School in the Bay of Islands, was a fluent talker, and her descriptions of the wonders of the thermal regions and of the eruption were a source of delight and interest to tourists. Among the notabilities whom Sophia conducted over the terraces was the Duke of Edinburgh, and, on the occasion of the present King's visit to Rotorua, she conducted the Duchess of York round Whakarewarewa.' (6)

New Zealand is not the only country with phantom boats, and serving as an omen is not their only function. A more traditional apparition was reported in the United States in 1897 in connection with a crime that made headlines on the eastern seaboard.On March 11, the body of a woman was found on the banks of the *Broadkill* Creek, a 13.3 mile long river that flows into Delaware Bay. It was found that the body belonged to Ms Gordy, who had arrived the day before from New York with her husband. Foul play was suspected, with Mr James M. Gordy as prime suspect. The trial began on 13 April 1897, Gordy was convicted on 16 April, and on 11 June, Gordy was

hanged in the Sussex County jail. Up until the end he had pleaded innocent, but could not produce a witness for his version of events that his wife had drowned. (7) Soon after Ms Gordy's body had been recovered, the crime had been replayed as a ghostly scene for two fishermen:

'A REPORTED PHANTOM BOAT. Two Fishermen Say They Saw What Appeared to Be an Apparition of Mr. and Mrs. Gordy [Special Dispatch to the Baltimore Sun]

GEORGETOWN – Considerable excitement has been caused among fishermen along the Broadkill river by *a* story told by two fishermen last *xxxday*. [illegible] Henry Warrington and Samuel Fisher went out on the *river* for a haul evening and rowed down below Vaughan's Landing and out toward the bay. A *little* time before 11 o'clock they started *west* with the assistance of the flood tide. They were approaching the bend *in the* river opposite the old glass works. Warrington, who had hold of the oars, says *he* saw an object half a mile up the river *and* called Fisher's attention to it. Their curiosity having been fully aroused, Warrington and Fisher stood up in their boat, and the craft drifted near the strange object. *In* the flood tide both men saw a boat. In *it* were a man and a woman, going in the direction of the other banks. The man was *rowing* hard, while the woman lay as if *dead in* the boat's stern. Warrington gave yell, and the object vanished. The two fishermen say that the place they last saw the mysterious craft, with strange passengers, was where the body Mrs. James M. Gordy was found (...) It was there that the murderer Gordy is supposed to have abandoned boat and gone ashore.' (8)

The gilded pages of yesterday's newspaper hold many fortean yarns, but ghost boats are still being reported. On 9 October 2010, the *Provincia di Varese* newspaper from Northern Italy reported that a Gavirate ghostbuster named Antonio Valmaggia has high hopes of receiving the Amazing Randi Award for proof of paranormal phenomena. Valmaggia is confident that, when he goes to Lake Maggiore next February, he will find conclusive evidence for the ghost ship of Cannero. "My plan", he explained, "is to complete surveys to document the many sightings people have made of the phantom ship, a boat which belonged to the Mazarditi brothers who were the pirates of the Castles of Cannero early in the 15th century." He intends to also find

proof for several other documented apparitions from southern Switzerland to northern Italy. Valmaggia has invited Cicap Ticino, the Swiss branch of CICOP, to participate. "I hope they help me in my research by supplying scientific controls and critical methods." His confidence comes from the fact that he thinks Lake Maggiore is a focus of spirit activity and that he has received many closely tallying testimonies from Cannero from absolutely reliable persons – none of which is printed in the paper, but we may assume they belong into our time and age.

Notes

1. *Timaru Herald*, 30 May 1876, p. 6. Earlier version of the same article can be found in the *Marlborough Express*, 3 May 1876, p. 3; *New Zealand Tablet*, 19 May 1876, p. 11; *Timaru Herald*, 22 May 1876, p. 3; *Grey River Argus*, 29 May 1876, p. 2

2. *Te Aroha News*, 19 June 1886, p. 5

3. *Star*, 14 June 1886, p. 3

4. *Nelson Evening Mail*, 24 June 1886, p. 2. A similar article in: *North Otago Times*, 19 June 1886, p. 3

5. Nelson Evening Mail, 11 September 1886, p. 4

6. *Evening Post*, 5 December 1911, p. 3; *Ashburton Guardian*, 5 December 1911; *NZ Truth*, 9 December 1911

7. *New York Times*, 14 March 1897; 16 April 1897; 12 June 1897

8. *The Sun*, Baltimore Mar 24, 1897, p. 2 (italics indicate several bad spots interpreted by author)

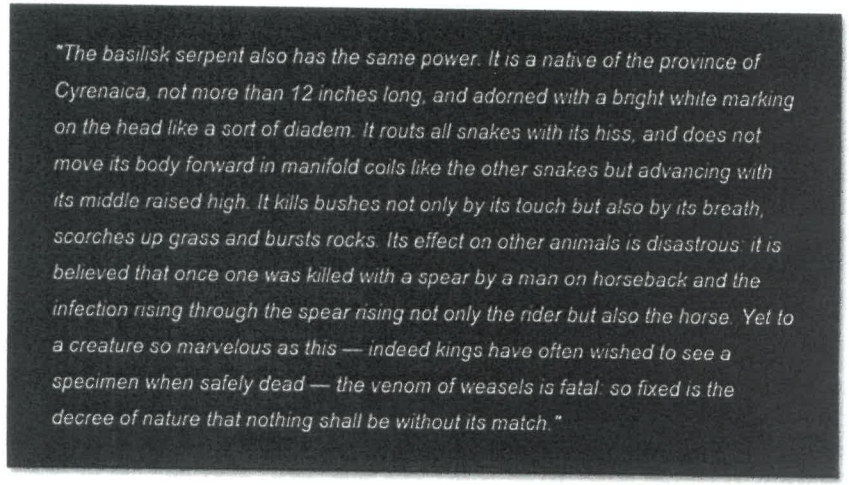
THE BASILISK OF WARSCHAU

Loes Modderman

Source: Mike Dash and Jan Bondeson

Mythical animals are fascinating. How they were created and found a way in the myths of every culture is often no longer traceable. The mist of time covers their origins.
In Western culture some of them found their form in the stories of travellers who encountered strange beasts they never knew existed, and their tall tales were embroidered with gruweling details no one could check.
Medieval artists were happy to satisfy their appetite for the weird in the Gargoyles on cathedral roofs, or in the margins of their wonderful illuminated books. But some of those fantasy creatures pre-date the Middle Ages.

The Basilisk, a combination of a rooster and a snake-shaped dragon, was already described in the Bible, in several verses of **Jesaja**. More well known is the description by the Roman writer **Plinius the Elder**


"The basilisk serpent also has the same power. It is a native of the province of Cyrenaica, not more than 12 inches long, and adorned with a bright white marking on the head like a sort of diadem. It routs all snakes with its hiss, and does not move its body forward in manifold coils like the other snakes but advancing with its middle raised high. It kills bushes not only by its touch but also by its breath, scorches up grass and bursts rocks. Its effect on other animals is disastrous: it is believed that once one was killed with a spear by a man on horseback and the infection rising through the spear rising not only the rider but also the horse. Yet to a creature so marvelous as this — indeed kings have often wished to see a specimen when safely dead — the venom of weasels is fatal: so fixed is the decree of nature that nothing shall be without its match."

(23-79 CE) in Naturalis Historia, book 8, 33. Below the text: not an animal you would like to encounter.

Basilisk or Amphysian Cockatrice, tail nowed.

The most modern version of the Basilisk is the gigantic one we know from his battle with Harry Potter.
His deadly red eyes are his most effective weapon, killing every opponent unless he dies from looking into a mirror, killing himself.
That element is part of most legends about the Basilisk, although the appearance of the creep is as diverse as the stories.

Of course a Basilisk has to come from somewhere. He is born, like any other animal, right?
Today we would probably create him in a testtube, but in Medieval times he was doubtless the offspring of a rooster. Roosters are not in the habit of laying eggs, so a rooster egg was pretty special.
The story went that when roosters were no longer able to fertilize hens, they sometimes layed a small, ugly egg. That egg had to be kept in a heap of manure, to keep it warm, and then a toad had to hatch it.

The young Basilisk will hide in the darkness of a deep cellar or in a well, till someone passes whom he can intoxicate or probably kill.

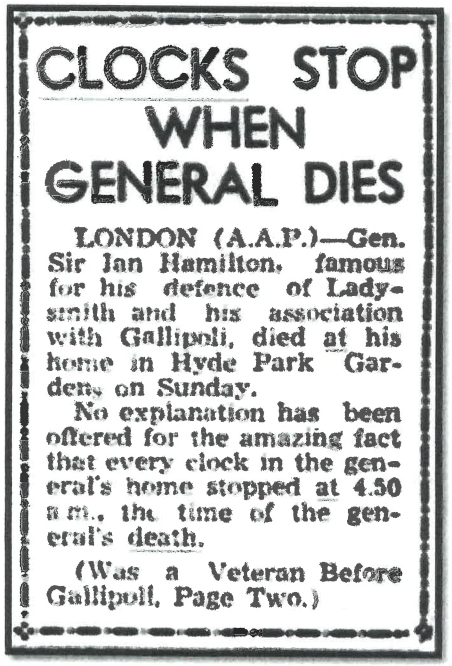
Several unexplainable diseases were attributed, by lack of a better explanation, to the toxic breath of a Basilisk. Like the one who kept himself hidden in the Temple of Lucia in Rome, during the pontificate of Pope Leo IV (847-855). The breath of the creature caused a terrible outbreak of the Plague, but the pius Pope defeated the creep with his prayers, according to the 16th century writer Julius Scaliger.

It was not unusual in former ages to convict an animal for murder or an unnatural. deed. That happened in 1474 to a rooster, who was found in the act of laying an egg, in Basel. The verdict was clear: death penalty, on the stake. Poor rooster.

TIME AND DEATH

Loes Modderman

TIME is a mystery. We measure it, we experience it, and without the notion and tracking of time no civilisation could function. Nevertheless, there is a lot about 'TIME' we can't lay the finger on. Most notably the mysterious way time is connected to our life, from birth to death. Our time of birth is important, astrologers say, and they make use of complicated charts to connect that moment to character traits we may develop and life events we may experience.
World events, they say, are subject to the same laws, and some religions, like Hinduism, measure time in cycles of many thousands of years, each with their specific character.
But all that is not the subject of this article.
This is about something much closer to home: the strange connection that seems to exist between people and the clocks that were part of their lives.



CLOCKS STOP WHEN GENERAL DIES

LONDON (A.A.P.)—Gen. Sir Ian Hamilton, famous for his defence of Ladysmith and his association with Gallipoli, died at his home in Hyde Park Gardens on Sunday.

No explanation has been offered for the amazing fact that every clock in the general's home stopped at 4.50 a.m., the time of the general's death.

(Was a Veteran Before Gallipoli, Page Two.)

Years ago an American friend wrote me about what had happened when her father died.
The old wrist watch he wore most of his life stood still on the *exact* moment he died.
No obvious reason, the watch had worked perfectly during his life, but somehow it 'gave up the ghost' together with its owner.
I had read about such cases, but hearing it first hand from someone I knew was surprising.I started looking for other cases. There are many.
On a forum I found someone from the West Midlands, who told in 1997 that at the sudden death of his mother in 1985, the clock on the mantlepiece,

standing there for 40 years without a single problem, stopped ticking at the exact moment of her death, at 15.30 u .
An uncanny story, actually. For it continues thus:
For 5 years the clock stood unmoving, remembering the death of this woman. Then her husband started to clean the clock and make it run again. But now the clock refused to give any other time then 10.30. The man gave up, went shopping, and died of a heart attack. We can guess when: at 10.30 AM. So in this case the clock had predicting properties as well.

Another very strange story came from a woman who wrote this:

"My father bought a beautiful with mother of pearl idecorated music clock for my mother.
Every quarter the clock played 'Home Sweet Home' . When my father dies, some years after the death of my mother, the clock was given to my son. A short time thereafter my son became seriously ill. The clock now played 'Home Sweet Home' continuously. When the mechanism was unwound completely my son died, at the last sound ofthe somg. I couldn't bring myself to rewinding it, but I hang it on the wall.
A friend offered to repair it. . For a few months it worked perfectly. Then the clock went haywire again, playing Home Sweet Home till it stopped. I phoned my friend. The moment the clock stopped his son had died of a heart attack "
Such stories beg the question if clocks can be 'possessed' , or 'cursed', just like dolls and many other objects can. It seems so.

This clipping (on the previous page)is from the *Examiner* , Tasmania, Tue 14 Oct 1947. Not one clock but every one in his house went dead in solidarity with the general's demise.A standing clock that had been in the family for 5 generations, was in the habit to stop at the exact moment of someone's death. In the past people died at home, so people noticed the stopping of a clock ticking and banging all the time. In this case the man who inherited the clock put it unceremoniously in the store room. Shortly thereafter he died. His daughter freaked out, and sold the clock to an antiquarian. What happened after the is, regrettably, unknown.

It has long been tradition to cover mirrors and clocks when someone was about to die.
Mirrors were thought to be a door to another dimension, and there was a belief that the parting spirit could get stuck in the mirror. But clocks? Connecting clocks to the impending death of a family member can only have been inspired by experiences like the ones above.

I found a story on internet, written by 'MSO' . I tried to find the writer but were unsuccessful.
I hope he doesn't mind when I place it here:***Every week for 30 years Dr. Farrer wound the clock on St. James Church in Clapham, England. It stopped at the exact minute he died.***

Every week for 30 years Dr. John Farrer who lived in Clapham, North Yorkshire climbed the narrow, stone spiral staircase of St. James Church up into the tower so he could wind the heavy weights of the clock and clean it as well. In the past few years he had regretfully handed over the task he had loved as it was too much for him to manage. St. James Church has been in existence since at least the 12th century. Clapham is a village with less than 700 people and the church with its chiming clock were very much a part of the day to day life of small village. So when it stopped on New Year's Day people noticed.

Originally from Australia, Dr. Farrer emigrated to England when he inherited the family estate in Clapham that was acquired in the 1700s. He died at his home on January 1, 2014 at the age of 92 at 8:15 in the morning surrounded by his family. His son who shares the same name and is also a doctor glanced at his watch from habit as his father took his last breath. Later he spoke with two villagers who remarked on the fact that the clock had stopped on the day of the doctor's death. It was then that his son realized that the clock had stopped at exactly the moment his father had died. Clocks have been a symbol of death for many years. In Victorian times it was imperative to stop the home's clock at the time of death because people believed that the person's spirit would stay to haunt since the clock's ticking, heralding the passage of time, would confuse the spirit into thinking that it was still alive. A more scientific explanation is that stopping the clock was just a convenient way to record the time of death.
However, clocks stopping on their own accord and especially at the exact moment of death, makes you wonder. The clock on St. James Church was started again after Dr. Farrer's funeral.
Some clocks vibrate sympathetically from a distance. Lyall Watson writes in his very interesting book *'On the Nature of*

Things' (1990) about many inanimate things that inexplicably come to life, like objects in a horror movie. He tells us the story of the 19 year old Derek Bentley, sentenced to death in 1953 for a murder he didn't commit. The execution would happen at 9 AM. His mother and sister were with heavy harts listening to the ticking clock...till it stopped at 9 AM exactly. Definitely; It never ticked again.

The fate of Royal families seems to be expecially connected to clocks.
The earliest example of such a connection we find in the astronomical clock that was originally made for *Henry VIII* in 1540 . When he died in 1547 the clock stopped working. Seven years later it stopped again when his son Edward VI died. The great clock is now housed between the towers of Hampton Court Palace in Surrey, UK. Let's hope it will keep to its duties in all circumstances.

The Australian paper *'The Daily News'* of 19 December 1903 writes about another English example. In the House of Lords is a clock also intimately connected to the Royal family. When William IV (1765-1837) were busy dying, the clock mimicked the kings lack of breath by gurgling. When the king's last breath was taken the clock died too. No one could get it to work again. But after the funeral the clock took up its duties. Until another member of the royal family died.
It's doubtful if this story is true, but who knows.
Nevertheless, this is a real phenomenon. There's plenty of proof that in some cases these things really happen.
There's an old version, 1876 of the song later made famous by Johnny Cash, here sung by Tom Roush: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=su7IECXoKLg

And here's Johnny Cash version: of *'My Grandfathers Clock'*, which says it all:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0o8A4RccUY

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE "WEREWOLF" OR "BIGFOOT" OF ALCONBURY

by RICHARD GEORGE

In Christopher Huff's exhaustive reference work on hauntings at Second World War airfields, we find the following very curious account.

"One of the commonly reported sightings at Alconbury was that of the "Hardstand 70 Monster". This account is related by the son of the NCO in charge of three men and their dogs in the early 1970s who were responsible for guarding the bunkers within a large fenced area.

One foggy night he received a radio call that there was an intruder within the perimeter, and that shots had been fired. He sped towards the location of the shooting and saw a figure in the fog… He rolled down his window and was screamed at full in the face by what can only be described as a man-like, bipedal creature which in an instant ran off at an incredible speed…

The guards all witnessed the creature making running bounds across the ground, before leaping over two tall and well-spaced barbed wire fences in a single bound and disappeared [*sic*] into the surrounding woods.

The creature was described as hairy, approximately five feet nine inches in height, and having intelligent, human-like eyes, a flat nose, and large ears. The teeth were large but not fanged. The lower face was rounded, the face was narrow around the eyes, but the head flared out again at the top. It had very muscular, frog-like thighs" (1). Other accounts from Alconbury can be found on John Knifton's website (2), including one from 1970 from "wes", who describes the entity as "A werewolf (lack of better description)".

Alconbury is in what used to be known as Huntingdonshire, not that far from Rendlesham Forest, abode of a zoological impossibility known as the Shug Monkey, which combines the attributes of a dog, an ape, and a bear (and possibly other fauna !) "An unholy combination of mastiff and great ape" is how Jonathan Downes depicts it (3). It surprises me that the cryptid at Alconbury has not been viewed in that context. A 1956 Shug Monkey witness, Sam Holland, said it had "incredibly muscular thighs", which chimes with the description in Huff, although Holland recalled it walked on four legs (4).

Nick Redfern, Richard Freeman and Jonathan Downes visited Rendlesham Forest as part of their cryptozoological odyssey *a trois*, and heard werewolf-like howling. Jonathan thought he caught a glimpse of "something running low and fast" across the deserted runway of RAF Woodbridge. How very Huffish – and if that isn't a word it should be.

What should we make of all this ? In my self-appointed role as "Inspector Morse investigating the Paranormal", I have to address the obvious possibilities first. Could it have been a prank involving a monkey or werewolf costume ? David Clarke, after all, has suggested the whole Rendlesham UFO caboodle was an elaborate hoax perpetrated on the USAF by the SAS (5). And And *Fortean Times* recently published a piece claiming the 1978 "Silver Man" case at Risley Atomic Agency Authority, another high security site, was a hoax concocted by bored fire staff (6).

But what about the leaping over two barbed wire fences ?

The other sensible sceptical (boring) option is that the creature was an escaped chimpanzee, misidentified in the fog. This might explain the "thighs like a frog" detail, the entity's speed and agility, its scream, and some of its facial characteristics. It so happens there is a place not that far from Alconbury that might have owned a chimpanzee... Huntingdon Life Sciences, founded in 1951.

But chimpanzees are not five foot nine in height. However if visibility was restricted, and the chimp was clinging to the vehicle,

with its head at the same level as the driver, it might have appeared to be taller than it was.

But not all the witnesses were drivers, and not all the sightings were in fog...

This whole incident reminds me of a passage in Jonathan Downes's *Monster Hunter*. When he was working as a psychiatric nurse at Shawcross Hospital in Devon in the early 1980s, he was told a story about how in 1942 the local Home Guard, in pursuit of what they thought was an escaped German POW, in fact found a naked mud-encrusted man covered from head to foot in hair. (*Dad's Army* meets *Doctor Who* !) This individual was taken away in conditions of secrecy and never seen again. Jonathan did some research and discovered that a wealthy local family had a genetic predisposition to congenital generalised hypertrichosis, also known as "Wolf-man Syndrome" (7).

So once again, a hairy weirdo and a connection with the military. But are sufferers from CGH routinely bundled off to installations ? It seems unlikely.

If you fancy something a bit stranger, could the beast of Alconbury have been a human-chimpanzee hybrid ? Some believe "humanzees" are a scientific possibility. Gordon Gallup, the evolutionary psychologist, was allegedly told by one of his professors that such a creature had been produced at an experimental facility in Florida in the 1920s (8). Were top secret shenanigans like these going on at Huntingdon Life Sciences in the early 1970s (9) ?

Nick Redfern says there are reports of werewolf-like cryptids near military installations from several global locations (10). This could easily take us into Stalin, Ivanov and "Ape-Man Army" territory. That can't be happening. Can it ? Redfern's conclusion; "I freely admit I am utterly baffled".

So am I. All I can add is this. A character in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar says

Cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war (Act 3, Scene 1).

"The dogs of war" has become a cliché of fiction, film and television. There are no less than nine rock songs with that title (11). Did this pervasive phrase in some way influence what the witnesses perceived ?

Speaking of rock songs… there is one last possibility. There was another hirsute life form in the early Seventies… the hippie. An anti-Vietnam protester, maybe, an Amon Duul II Yeti ? One of the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers ?

And what about Steppenwolf ?

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(9) Interestingly, Lindsay Anderson's 1973 film *O Lucky Man* features a horrifying pig-human hybrid. Were stories of this sort circulating at the time ?

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Sealing the Identity of An Alleged Steller`s Sea-Cow Skin

Dr Karl Shuker

Shuker Nature blog March 25th 2019

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"By the Great Combers of Magellan!" he said, beneath his moustache. "Who in the Deep Sea are these people?"

They were like no walrus, sea-lion, seal, bear, whale, shark, fish, squid, or scallop that Kotick [the white seal] had ever seen before. They were between twenty and thirty feet long, and they had no hind flippers, but a shovel-like tail that looked as if it had been whittled out of wet leather. Their heads were the most foolish-looking things you ever saw, and they balanced on the ends of their tails in deep water when they weren't grazing, bowing solemnly to each other and waving their front flippers as a fat man waves his arm.

"Ahem!" said Kotick. "Good sport, gentlemen?" The big things answered by bowing and waving their flippers like the Frog-Footman [from *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland*]. When they began feeding again Kotick saw that their upper lip was split into two pieces that they could twitch apart about a foot and bring together again with a whole bushel of seaweed between the splits. They tucked the stuff into their mouths and chumped solemnly…

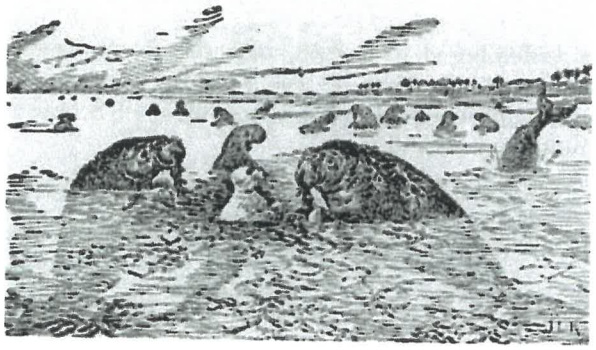
"Well!" said Kotick. "You're the only people I've ever met uglier than Sea Vitch – and with worse manners."

Then he remembered in a flash what the Burgomaster gull had screamed to him when he was a little yearling at Walrus Islet, and he tumbled backward in the water, for he knew that he had found Sea Cow at last.

Rudyard Kipling – 'The White Seal', from *The Jungle Book*

Back in the 1800s, naturalists were much more open to zoological anomalies, mysteries, and curiosities, including those of the cryptozoological kind, than they are today. Never was this openness more readily visible, however, than in the pages of a fascinating British monthly periodical entitled *The Zoologist* (published 1843-1916), which was packed throughout with contributions from amateur wildlife enthusiasts and eminent biologists alike on every conceivable (and inconceivable!) aspect of natural and, especially, unnatural history.

Today, conversely, such oddities that cannot be readily pigeon-holed into 'acceptable', mainstream zoological categories rarely receive widespread hard-copy coverage outside of newspapers and Fortean publications – which is why *Flying Snake*, a periodical founded, published, edited, and lovingly compiled every 4-6 months by the indefatigable, inestimable cryptozoological and animal anomalies researcher Richard Muirhead is such an absolute delight, a veritable diamond among so much modern-day dross, especially online.



Steller's sea-cows with Kotick the white seal – an 1895 engraving for 'The White Seal', from Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (public domain)

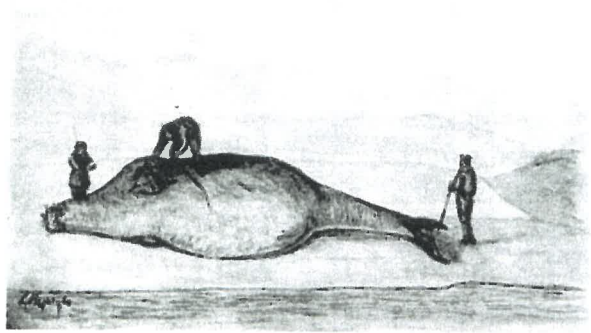
Steller's sea-cow, depicted on a local postage stamp issued for Russia's Commander (=Komandorski) Islands, a 17-strong group situated in the Bering Sea (east of the Kamchatka Peninsula in the Russian Far East), and around which this huge sea mammal once lived (public domain)

A natural, very worthy successor to *The Zoologist*, this wonderful little journal contains so much extraordinary, non-conventional Nature, the kind that cannot be readily found in any other present-day publication, that whenever I receive the latest issue I know full well that once I have opened it I shall find it impossible to put down until I have read it from cover to cover.

In the April 2014 issue (vol. 3, #7), however, Richard surpassed even his superlative ability to surprise me with his researches, by virtue of this issue's front cover-highlighted lead article. It consisted of an investigation conducted by Richard that quite simply took my breath away – by featuring the history and two vintage photographs (one of which appeared on the front cover) of what has seemingly long been claimed to be a bona fide torso skin (i.e. lacking the head, flippers, and tail) of *Hydrodamalis* [=*Rhytina*] *gigas*, the long-extinct Steller's sea-cow!

Previous page: The front cover of *Flying Snake*, April 2014, showcasing one of the two vintage photographs uncovered by Richard that allegedly depict a preserved Steller's sea-cow skin (© Richard Muirhead/*Flying Snake* – reproduced here on a strictly non-commercial Fair Use basis for educational/review purposes only)

As I have documented in greater detail within an earlier Shuker-Nature article (click **here** to read it), at up to 30 ft long Steller's sea-cow was by far the largest modern-day species of sirenian ever to have existed, very significantly bigger than the dugong and any of the manatees that still survive today. It was discovered in shallow waters around the Commander (aka Komandorski) Islands in what was later dubbed the Bering Sea, separating Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula from Alaska, by Arctic explorer Dr Georg W. Steller in 1741, during Danish explorer Vitus Bering's Russian expeditions there. Tragically, however, the inoffensive, unafraid behaviour of this huge herbivorous marine mammal, coupled with the abundance and very tasty nature of its meat, swiftly proved to be its undoing, dooming it to a rapid extinction despite its great numbers. For it was mercilessly, relentlessly slaughtered by hungry mariners penetrating its icy, inhospitable domain. By 1768, Steller's sea-cow was no more, exterminated from the Commander Islands' coastal waters that had been its home since time immemorial. Having said that, there have been infrequent subsequent reports from various remote Arctic outposts of extremely large, mystifying sea beasts that may – just may – be surviving sea-cows, but none has ever been confirmed

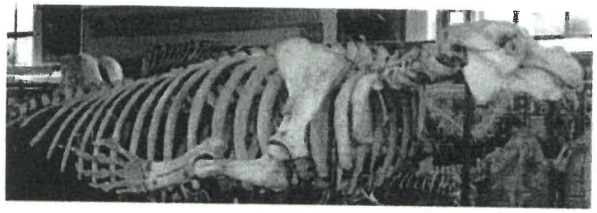


Previous page: **Reconstruction of Dr Georg W. Steller measuring a Steller's sea cow on Bering Island, 12 July 1742 (public domain)**

As for preserved physical remains of this veritable behemoth: a number of museums around the world have skeletons (complete, partial, or composite), skulls (ditto), or isolated bones (limb bones, vertebrae, ribs, etc) from Steller's sea-cows (click **here** to access an extensive listing of such specimens).

In addition, there are a few scraps of preserved skin on record that have been claimed to be from this lost species, but there are also counterclaims averring that they are actually from seals or cetaceans. According to the above listing of specimens, one such scrap is present in the Überseemuseum at Bremen, Germany (a photograph of it snapped on 29 January 2011 by Flickriver user MareCrisium can be viewed **here**). A second is (or was) held by Germany's Hamburg Zoological Museum (it may have been destroyed by bombing during World War II, and the above listing presumes that it is/was a misinterpreted whale skin anyway). And a third is held by the Zoological Institute of the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg, Russia (queried in the listing as a probable whale skin fragment again, and originally discovered in the Institute's collections by an A. Brandt). However, no museum or scientific institution anywhere in the world lays claim of any kind to possessing an entire torso skin from such a creature – which is why Richard's report and accompanying photographs were of such profound interest to me.

I strongly recommend everyone interested in this case to read Richard's original article, but in the meantime here is a summary of what he uncovered.It all began with a local newspaper article. On 6 April 1956, the *Kansas City Star* in the U.S.A. published the photograph that appears on the above-reproduced front cover of *Flying Snake* for April 2014, together with the following details. The person holding the torso skin, and pictured with it in her East Tenth Street, Intercity District, Kansas home's living room, was Mrs Faye Keyton, who had inherited it jointly with her brother, W.L. Shafer,



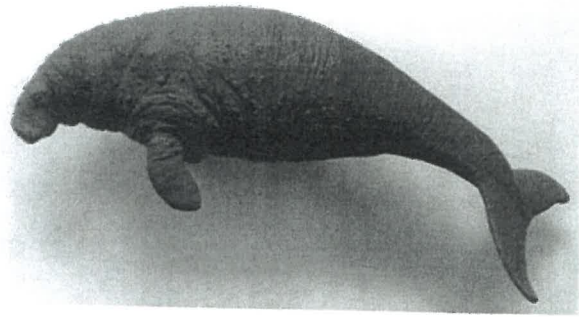
Skeleton of a Steller's sea-cow at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris, France (© FunkMonk/Wikipedia – CC BY-SA 3.0 licence

from their aunt, Miss Myrtle Shafer, who had died in May 1955. It was normally kept rolled up inside a long cardboard tube, was quite stiff, and accord- ing to Mrs Keyton it was an Alaskan Indi- an burial robe that had been made from the skin of a Stel- ler's sea-cow. But how did she know this? Key- ton revealed that her aunt had herself inher- ited it, from Jim Willoughby, a distant relative, who in turn had received it from his fa- ther, a certain Prof. Richard ('Dick') D. Willoughby (1832-1902), who had lived in Alaska for half a century, where he had been made an Indian chief and spoke their language. The robe was one

of his possessions that he had acquired there during that period, and when he died in 1902 it was placed over him during his funeral as part of a native Alaskan Indian burial ceremony

Previous page: **Vintage photograph from the late 1800s/very early 1900s depicting Prof. Willoughby with the burial robe (public domain)**

Reading this intriguing little history, I was immediately struck by the curious fact that there was no explanation as to why or how this robe was ever deemed to be the skin of a Steller's sea-cow. All that I can assume is that it had been labelled as such by Prof. Willoughby himself, with that identity having subsequently been accepted unquestioningly by, and duly passed on down through, the generations of the robe's inheritors. Unfortunately, however, this in turn leads to a major problem in accepting such an identification. For as revealed by Richard Muirhead in his *Flying Snake* article, Willoughby was a notorious practical joker and had a longstanding reputation as a teller of exceedingly tall tales. He was also known for attaching highly imaginative and often decidedly lurid back-stories to the many curios contained in his house that he had gathered from different parts of the Alaskan coast, many of which were of native Alaskan Indian origin. Taking all of this into account, it is by no means certain, therefore, that the robe really was a Steller's sea-cow skin – this could just as easily have been yet another fanciful yarn spun by Willoughby.



Steller's sea-cow model at London's Natural History Museum (© Emöke Dénes/Wikipedia CC BY-SA 4.0 licence)

But that is not all. Based upon direct eyewitness descriptions and sketches of Steller's sea-cow by Steller himself and other maritime travellers during the all-too-brief period of time spanning this species' discovery and destruction, the robe doesn't look at all like the skin of this officially extinct species. For whereas the latter's skin was said to be rough and spotted, this robe is smooth and bears two very distinctive, highly conspicuous white rings upon it as well as an upper and a lower white band. True, the robe's leather may have been tanned, making it smooth, but those very large white rings and bands are unlike anything ever recorded for Steller's sea-cow. In addition, judging from the photographs and allowing for forced perspective (in both photos, the skin was closer to the camera than the person was, thereby making the former appear bigger than it actually was), the skin was far smaller than any but the youngest of juvenile sea-cows would have been.One of Richard's correspondents, regular *Flying Snake* contributor Richard George, opined that he was certain that these distinctive markings had been painted on the skin. Bearing in mind that it was used as a ceremonial burial robe, adding such decorations to it as some form of symbolic representation would not be at all beyond the realms of possibility. If only the robe could be examined directly, however

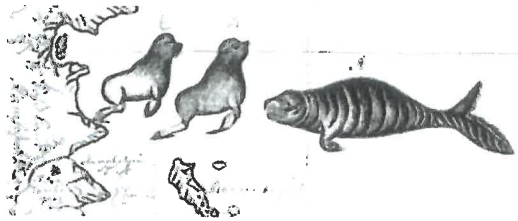
Exquisite engraving from 1898 depicting mature and juvenile Steller's sea-cows (public domain)

this would soon determine whether they were a natural component of it or had been artificially added. Moreover, with today's advances in DNA analyses, a sample of tissue taken from it would readily reveal the true taxonomic nature of the species from which the skin had been obtained. But therein lies a fundamental problem – its current whereabouts are presently unknown.

After reading Richard's article, I did consider attempting to trace the robe, by pursuing the current whereabouts of Mrs Keyton, her brother, or any children that either of them may have had. However, as so often happens, other matters diverted my attention, and eventually I forgot about this mysterious object – until this week, that is.

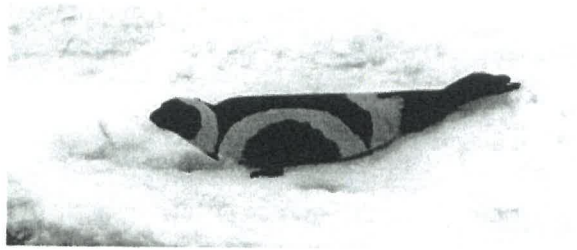
After having read with my usual enthusiasm the latest, newly-published issue (#14, January 2019) of *Flying Snake* a few days ago, I was about to place it with the other 13 issues on their allotted shelf in my study's cryptozoological section when, while idly flicking through them, I noticed the front cover of the April 2014 issue once more, the first time that I'd looked at it in a very long while – but this time something suddenly clicked inside my mind. I know that ringed patterning on the robe! I've seen it somewhere before, somewhere else.

Sitting there in thought, I recalled the above-linked listing of Steller's sea-cow material held by various museums around the world, and in particular I remembered those controversial fragments of skin that a few of the museums possessed, claimed by some to be genuine Steller's sea-cow relics but by others to be derived from whales or seals



Steller's sea-cow (right) with a Steller's sea lion and a northern fur seal, from a map of the Commander Islands drawn by Sven Waxell in 1891 (public domain)

And then, without warning, an image flashed into my mind – an image of an extremely distinctive species of sea mammal, one that, uniquely, possessed exactly the same ringed pelage as was so visibly present on the Alaskan burial robe, but a species that unlike Steller's sea-cow was still very much alive today. Suddenly, I knew exactly what the Alaskan burial robe had been obtained from – and it most definitely was *not* a Steller's sea-cow!Instead, it was from an exceptionally beautiful, exquisitely marked species of phocid (earless) seal – namely, *Histriophoca fasciata*, the ribbon or banded seal. Up to 5 ft long, it is native to the Arctic and subarctic regions of the northern Pacific Ocean, but especially the Bering Sea…separating Russia from Alaska! Moreover, it is immediately distinguished from all other seal species (and all other species of any kind of mammal, for that matter) by virtue of the two very large white circles on its body (one on each side) and also the two wide white bands encircling its neck and tail respectively that collectively decorate very strikingly its otherwise uniformly dark-brown or black pelage.



The ribbon or banded seal – an absolutely unmistakeable species (public domain)

All that I needed to do now in order to be absolutely certain was to uncover if I could a photograph of a torso skin of a ribbon seal to compare it directly with the Alaskan burial robe, and once I was on the trail it didn't take me long to find an excellent example. Comparing the two side by side, they were virtually identical, as shown below. Consequently, there could be absolutely no doubt whatsoever – just like so many other examples of his yarns on record, Willoughby's Steller's sea-cow skin was nothing but a tall tale. It was in reality the skin of a ribbon seal. Case closed.

Comparing Willoughby's Alaskan burial skin (left) with the skin of a ribbon seal (right) (© *Kansas City Star*, reproduced here on a strictly non-commercial Fair Use basis for educational/review purposes only / public domain)

I am delighted that Richard Muirhead brought this fascinating but hitherto little-publicised case to cryptozoological attention with his customary investigative zeal via his *Flying Snake* article, and that I in turn have been able to provide the solution to the longstanding riddle that its subject posed.

The "Schießschlangen" in the German-speaking part of Europe

Natale Guido Cincinnati

Tales of strange flying or jumping snakes are known from many parts of Europe. Surprisingly, there are also numerous concrete observations from older and more recent times, such as from the French and Italian Alps, the French Pyrenees, southern Spain, Serbia, Tyrol and central Poland (Toruń) (1). The centrally located German-speaking region is in no way inferior. Here, among other things, there are traditions of the so-called "Schießschlangen", which will be discussed in the following.

The term "Schießschlange" is not without its problems. In the context of our topic, the idea of snakes "*that are able to make long leaps*"(2) is of interest here.

However, the term "Schießschlangen" was also used to describe snakes that were already known or scientifically described, such as *Coluber aurora*,(3) described by Friedrich Heinrich Wilhelm Martini (1729-1778), "*because it can throw itself or dart at its prey as quickly as an arrow is shot through a string*"(4). The concept of "schießen" (=> "to shoot") of some snake species, which can already be found in Gesner's work, is meant here in the sense of darting or leaping.

Another complicating factor is that in some regions of Germany (e.g. Hesse and Siegerland), the term "Schießotter" ("Otter" => viper) or "Schießnatter" ("Natter" => colubrid) was also used to refer to the lizard.(5)

However, the darting snakes of interest here are neither known snake species nor lizards, but extraordinary snakes that could make long jumps or even fly. Traditions can be found, among other places, in the stories of Luxembourg and the western Eifel. This is how a teacher P. Hummer reported to the Luxembourg pedagogue and legend collector Nikolaus Gredt (1834-1909) around 1877:

"*The fact that there used to be Schießschlangen must have been correct, because there is a place near Rodingen (6)where such snakes used to be; many people from Rodingen have seen it and people still talk*

about it today as if it were a foregone conclusion. – The place where these snakes stayed is in the Rodinger forest, below the Fond de Graas. In this part of the forest, called »in the Krunpren«, many pure springs rise". And further: "*The Schießschlangen, which were much longer than the other snakes, liked to stay in places where they found bright water and cool forest shade; because they had to have water to bathe in from time to time.* [...] *There they were often seen by those walking through the forest or gathering wood in it, washing themselves and making their jumps, swinging themselves up the trees and then lowering themselves down to swing themselves up again.* [...] *Without wings, these animals could fly in the air with the speed of a shot arrow. This is probably where they got their name, Schießschlangen*"(7)

If a real animal was the original inspiration here, it was imprinted in the stories with all kinds of legendary features that are typical of snake stories. For example, wearing a coronet, jets of fire from the throat, carrying gold (cf. the Drak), drinking milk, making friends with children, wearing a carbuncle stone or flights to Babylon.(8)

In Braunlauf near St. Vith in the early 1930s, the carpenter and mill master Ilten tried to shed light on the background to the tales of the Schießschlangen by attributing them to the grass snake (*Natrix natrix*) to the folklorist Matthias Zender (1907-1993):

"*A 'Unke' is an animal similar to a frog. Here the grass snakes were called 'Unke'.*(9) *If you tease it properly, it jumps, but not longer than the 'Unke' is long. It is still not a dangerous animal. This has now grown to such an extent that people spent long evenings together telling each other stories about the 'Schießunken', it has come to this: So a 'Unke', if it is seven years old, then it can fly. Then they would fly through the air*"(10) (fig. 1).

Fig. 1: The "Unke" – formerly the grass snake (*Natrix natrix*),

Matthias Zender heard about the worker's wife Hansen from Born near St. Vith:
"*Between Born and Engelsdorf, there was a Schießunke. There was a pile of stones thrown together, there was the Schießunke. She shot quickly at the one who passed, at the heart, and drank his blood*".(11)
And the storytellers Packes and Dionys from Thommen (also near St. Vith) remember:
"*I remember from the old people that the Unken came through the air like that.* [...] *The Unken come flying, they do a cartwheel in the air, so I have been told*".(12)

If we leave the more legendary traditions, we can also find mentions of Schießschlangen in the natural history context in German-speaking countries. In his opus *Attempt at an Economic Natural History of the Kingdom of East and West Prussia*, the Protestant theologian, historian and librarian Friedrich Samuel Bock (1716-1785) also mentions the Schießschlangen (fig. 2).

Fig 2: The Protestant theologian, historian, librarian and writer Friedrich Samuel Bock (1716-1785)

In his description, however, the snakes that only dart out become blurred with those that perform real leaps:
"*Some foreign snakes have the property of darting with great agility at an object as if in flight. Of this kind is, for example, the Schießschlange* [-> darting snake] *in New Spain, the Pfeilschoß* [-> arrow shot] *in Surinam and the Wurfschlange* [-> toss snake] *in Egypt. However, snakes have also been seen in Prussia which agree with these, and I assume that such snakes were seen here more often in earlier times, because the word Schießschlange has even become a proverb* [...] *Gottsched* (13)*remembers that this kind of creature had been killed on*

the occasion of a search for herbs, and that five young birds had been found in its body. The mother of these birds was also found killed by her [the snake] *in the vicinity*"(14). The latter is probably no problem for a jumping or even flying snake, which is what Bock seems to imply here.
It then goes on to say: "*Mr Helwing also tracked down such a Schießschlange in Neuhausen. For when the latter heard that a snake was said to be in the Thiergarten (15), slithering about in the branches of the trees and shooting back and forth between the trees like an arrow, he wanted to be an eyewitness to it himself, as he doubted the tale. He went to the said place in company with the head forester, and after they had searched in vain for some time, the snake darted from a leafy tree at the face of Mr. Helwing, who struck it away with the stick which he held before the face, and killed it on the ground. According to his description, it was over three spans long* [> 60 cm], *ash-grey in colour with black spots, had a small head curved upwards but somewhat flattened on both sides, a blunt mouth and small teeth in both jaws*"(16) (fig. 3).

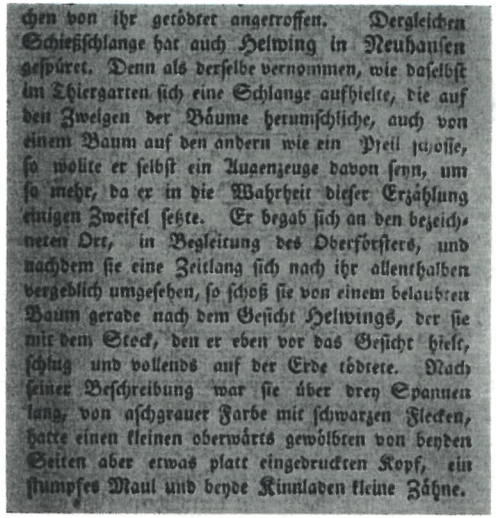

chen von ihr getödtet angetroffen. Dergleichen Schießschlange hat auch Helwing in Neuhausen gespüret. Denn als derselbe vernommen, wie daselbst im Thiergarten sich eine Schlange aufhielte, die auf den Zweigen der Bäume herumschliche, auch von einem Baum auf den andern wie ein Pfeil schosse, so wollte er selbst ein Augenzeuge davon seyn, um so mehr, da er in die Wahrheit dieser Erzählung einigen Zweifel setzte. Er begab sich an den bezeichneten Ort, in Begleitung des Oberförsters, und nachdem sie eine Zeitlang sich nach ihr allenthalben vergeblich umgesehen, so schoß sie von einem belaubten Baum gerade nach dem Gesicht Helwings, der sie mit dem Stock, den er eben vor das Gesicht hielt, schlug und vollends auf der Erde tödtete. Nach seiner Beschreibung war sie über drey Spannen lang, von aschgrauer Farbe mit schwarzen Flecken, hatte einen kleinen oberwärts gewölbten von beyden Seiten aber etwas platt eingedruckten Kopf, ein stumpfes Maul und beyde Kinnladen kleine Zähne.

Fig 3: Hunting a Schießschlange in the *Natural History* by Friedrich Samuel Bock (1784)

What all Schießschlangen seem to have in common is that they have neither small wings on their heads(17) nor real wings on their bodies. Instead, they are rather jumpy animals that can even move through the air from one tree to another at the speed of an arrow.
What is missing are more recent reports of encounters with Schießschlangen in German-speaking countries, so that depending on one's preferred point of view, one can speak either of an extinct narrative motif or of an extinct group of animals. Matthias Zender, who addresses the Schießschlangen as purely mythical figures, sees their existence as a narrative motif threatened as early as the 1930s, since they have no connection to the theme of hauntings and ghosts, as well as legends of the dead and witches, and also have no basis in religious and ecclesiastical belief.(18) A preserving thematic context is thus not given. From a cryptozoological point of view, precisely this could be interpreted as an indication of the actual existence of the Schießschlangen. However, much more evidence is needed for the assumption of an unknown, extinct snake species in Central Europe.

At the present time, we will refrain from attempting to explain the Schießschlange, as the evidence and observations gathered are still too small in number. In any case, the explanations for jumping and flying snakes that have been put forward so far are all insufficient, as the speculative elements they contain still predominate. This applies not only to the cryptozoological effort to make these snakes into real, as yet undescribed species, and the sceptical explaining away by means of perceptual illusions and misinterpretations, but also to the folkloristic approach, which is so far little more than a concept. It is by no means sufficiently clear whether the so-called collective unconscious, which is often taken up in the folkloristic approach, exists at all or how it functions. It is also completely unclear whether or how images from a person's inner world can be projected outwards and have a lasting influence on sensory perception, interpretation and memorisation of an observation. As long as it is not possible to fully explain how and under which circumstances a currently only assumed psychological mechanism functions, cryptozoological attempts to explain it stand on an equal footing with others, even if they must be classified as very improbable from a conventional zoological perspective.
We are – as in so many other places – still at the beginning when it comes to the question of the reality status of extraordinary and

unknown snakes. Whether cryptid snakes are real and yet-to-be-discovered animals, whether they are well-known but mythically transfigured beyond recognition, or whether they are (or were) fully mythical figures of popular belief without any basis in reality, remains to be answered. It is therefore advisable to gather further observations, compare them, classify them if possible, before confronting them with explanatory thoughts. Until then, a systematic search in natural history works of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries could lead to interesting finds.

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1.Meurger 2016, pp. 4-9.

2. Hoffmann-Krayer 1936, col. 1119.

3. According to its scientific name, the South African Aurora house snake, now *Lamprophis aurora* (in the meantime, for example, also *Duberria aurora* (Fitzinger 1826, p. 56)); according to the description, however, it is rather a North African or Mediterranean species of the genus *Coluber*.

4. Martini 1778, p. 78.

5. Riegler 1930, col. 673.

6. Canton of Esch on the Alzette in the extreme south of Luxembourg.

7. Gredt 1883, pp. 269-270, no. 492.

8. Cf. Gredt 1883, pp. 269-273, no. 492-498.

9. A „Unke", "Hausunke", "Hausotter" (house viper) or „Hausnatter" (house colubrid) was originally understood to be a snake, mostly the grass snake (*Natrix natrix*). It was not until the 17th century that it was also understood to include the fire-bellied toads (*Bombina*) (Petzoldt 2003, pp. 165-166).

10. Zender 1980, p. 513, no. 1644.

11. Zender 1980, p. 514, no. 1645.

12. Zender 1980, p. 514, no. 1646.

13. This refers to the German physician, physicist and meteorologist Johann Gottsched (1668-1704).

14. Bock 1784, pp. 498-499.

15. „*Thiergarten*" (=> animal garden) was a hunting ground near Neuhausen, former district of Samland (north-east Prussia), today Gurjewsk.

16. Bock 1784, p. 499.

17. Compare the ophidian snakes cited by Meurger (Meurger 2016, p. 4).

18. Zender 1987, pp. 247-248.

Notes and Queries

Wallaby on the loose in County Durham

The Times November 24th 2020

Police Hunt little bounder on the loose

"The sight of a small marsupial bounding across the road in the outer suburbs of Sydney would hardly raise an eyebrow. The same cannot be said for Co.Durham.

Last weekend villagers in Evenwood could scarcely believe their eyes as a wallaby went walkabout,scampering across the grass verges and hopping down a tree-lined lane in the middle of Saturday afternoon…"

Snake of shimmering colours in Vietnam

https://edition.cnn.com/2020/12/09/asia/vietnam-snake-discovered-intl-hnk-scli-scn/index.html?fbclid=IwAR2Qevqz30Yy36qfN2ndhncuqA8N4-da7TiR_4i2i2SzVh_O1-YyDz8Kp8g

Iridescent snake with shimmering scales discovered in Vietnam

Jessie Yeung,CNN December 9th 2020

"In 2019, American and Vietnamese scientists were researching biodiversity in the jungles and mountains of Vietnam when they stumbled upon a strange-looking snake.

It was dark and iridescent, its scales shifting through blues and greens in the light. The scales were small, ridged, and oddly patterned. The seasoned scientists had no idea what it was -- and soon realized they were looking at an undiscovered species."

Odd Cock **Warwick Examiner** and Times (Qld)

April 11th 1903

Cock Lays 12 Eggs.

A sphere-shaking event has happened at Junee, N.S.W. A rooster has laid 12 eggs! They are exactly like a hen's egg, and taste the same when cooked. The rooster's wives seem to resent his intrusion into their unassailable monopoly of egg laying, so he is kept penned up alone, and its owner has his meals in the yard watching the bird. The laying rooster has evolved this problem to vex our dreams: If the eggs were hatched under a hen, which would be the mother of the chickens?

Arrival of European dormouse in Britain

Thanks to Richard George for providing this information

Fears carnivorous European dormice are breeding in Britain

"To a passer-by, the fluffy, cartoonish creature on the ground could have been a cuddly toy dropped by a child on a trip to the New Forest National Park.

However ,to those with a knowledge of rodents, the animal seen in the park for the first time is the rather less innocuous garden dormouse—an invasive species and a tough meat-eater that is feared now to be breeding in Britain.

This year, wildlife experts have spotted the species in Derbyshire and the New Forest,prompting concerns that it has been deliberately released. They are usually found in France,Spain and Italy…"

New Species in Atlantic

12 new species found in Atlantic

The I paper December 29th 2020

Researchers studying the deep Atlantic have discovered 12 species previously unknown. New sea mosses, molluscs and corals had eluded scientists because the sea floor is so unexplored. Researchers warn that the newly discovered animals may already be under threat from climate change. Carbon dioxide absorbed by the ocean is making it more acidic, causing coral skeletons in particular to corrode. Professor George Wolff,an ocean chemist from Liverpool University ,who was involved in the project, said "We have better maps of the surface of the Moon and Mars than of the sea floor."

New species of British apple?

Man spots entirely new variety of apple while on woodland run

(My friend with whom I talked to about this apple puts the "new variety" down to evolution.)

The Guardian November 28th 2020

"A chance find of an apple on a woodland run has led one nature lover to discover a new variety,which he is hoping to propagate and name. Archie Thomas, who lives in the Nadder Valley in Wiltshire,stumbled across a solitary windfall apple on track alongside a large area of woodland earlier this month. The apple ,which Thomas said was "unlike any I`d seen before," had come from a lone old tree in a hedge row with a large number of apples on it…"

Vietnamese Tortoise Rediscovered

The Guardian online January 2nd 2021https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jan/01/hopes-for-most-endangered-turtle-after-discovery-of-female-in-vietnam-lake

Hopes for most endangered turtle after discovery of female in Vietnam lake

The last known male giant Swinhoe's softshell turtle is no longer alone on the planet after the discovery of a female of his species.

The female 86kg (13 stone) turtle was found in Dong Mo lake, in Hanoi's Son Tay district, and captured for genetic testing in October.

DNA tests have now confirmed the animal is a Swinhoe's softshell turtle, (*Rafetus swinhoei*), the most endangered turtle in the world.

Another turtle estimated to weigh 130kg was sighted in the lake, and conservationists hope that this could be another male.

The only known male Swinhoe's softshell turtle is at Suzhou zoo in China. Scientists aim to ensure that the turtles are given the chance to breed and save the species from the brink of extinction.

The animal, known also as the Hoan Kiem turtle or Yangtze giant softshell turtle, has been driven to the brink by hunting for its meat and eggs, as well as by destruction of its habitat..."

Blood drinking finches of the Galapagos Islands

This is not a cpyptid species, I first came across them on a David Attenborough television documentary `A Perfect Planet` on BBC 1 on January 3rd 2021:Quoting from website :https://www.galapagosislands.com/nature/wildlife/birds/vampire-finch.html

"The Galapagos is well known to be the home of many strange and unusual creatures. One of the most interesting animals is the vampire finch *(Geospiza difficilis septentrionalis)*. This unusual bird is a subspecies of the sharp-beaked ground finch that lives on Darwin and Wolf Islands and has some striking behavioural differences from other sharp-beaked ground finches.This bird earns its common name from its unusual diet. It occasionally drinks the blood of Nazca or blue-footed boobies. The sharp-beaked ground finch normally feeds on seeds and insects, but such things can often be in short supply on Darwin and Wolf. The vampire finch evolved this distinguished behaviour to supplement its diet..."

Hundreds of birds found dead in Rome Street

Daily Mail online January 2nd 2021

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9106377/Hundreds-birds-dead-Rome-street-frightened-death-New-Year-fireworks.html

Hundreds of birds are found dead on Rome street after being 'frightened to death by New Year fireworks'

- Hundreds of birds were discovered dead on the streets of Rome by passers-by
- Animal rights groups claimed they were 'scared to death' by fireworks exploding

City officials had banned the use of pyrotechnics to protect people and animals

"Scores of dead birds found dead in Italy are said to have suffered heart attacks because of fireworks set off in the city centre.

Hundreds of the little feathered creatures' bodies were recorded in several locations around Rome, including its Roma Termini train station, by shocked passers-by.

Animal rights groups say the tragedy was caused by fireworks set off on New Year's Eve which scared them to death...."

Enigmatic bird in Thomas Hardy novel

I have been reading The Return of the Native by Thomas Hardy and in the New Wessex Edition (1974)there is an end note to page 113 which mentions a cream coloured courser,usually a bird of north Africa and southern Asia,killed in 1853 by order of the Earl of Ilchester at what Hardy refers to as Egdon Heath which in reality is east of Dorchester and north-west of Wareham. .Hardy`s source is J.Hutchin`s History and Antiquities of Dorset,3rd ed,4 vols,1861-70.I haven`t researched as to whether or not this bird has arrived in Britain since then.

Mystery cat in Macclesfield area

Cheshire Live online January 9th 2021https://www.cheshire-live.co.uk/news/chester-cheshire-news/cheshire-big-cat-mystery-police-19567745

Mystery surrounds the death of a number of sheep on a Cheshire farm, with police investigating whether a "larger predator" than a dog was behind the attack.

Officers from Cheshire Police's Rural Crime Team visited the farm on December 30, and spoke to the farmer, who it is understood told them of past sightings of what looked like a big cat in the area.

Six of the livestock had died and four had been seriously injured and had to be put to sleep.

But there is reason to believe that officers do not believe that the latest incident was down to a canine, but to a "larger predator".

In a post on the Cheshire Police Rural Crime Team Facebook page, headed 'Sheep Mystery', an officer wrote: "The area has very little human interaction and at the moment the thought is very much on a larger predator and not as initially thought, a dog attack".

The post also added that "on speaking to the farmer they confirmed a sighting some years ago of a very large black cat type animal not a million miles from this location".

The post was later removed. Cheshire Police has not confirmed why, but has not disputed the contents of the officer's post.

A spokesman said: "Police received a report at around 3pm on 30 December 2020 that a number of sheep had been killed at a farm in Macclesfield.

"Officers initially spoke with the farmer over the phone and later visited the site.

"The farmer had found that six sheep had died and that another four had sustained serious injuries. The sheep were later put down due to their injuries.

"It is not known what caused the injuries to the sheep and enquiries are ongoing."

An earlier attack in Gawsworth, close to Macclesfield, in which a sheep was mauled, had been put down by officers from the Rural Crime Team to a dog attack. The Rural Crime Team has also recently been making enquiries into an incident in Mobberley, where two sheep were found with throat injuries.Reported sightings of big cats in Cheshire are not uncommon. In September 2011, one 999 caller reported seeing a tiger walking along the River Dee in Chester, describing it as "three times as big as a cat, but fatter", stripy, with a black ringed tail and a black tip.

One alarmed resident was so concerned they alerted the police that a "wild cat" the "size of a wall" might be loose in Tarporley town centre, after walking past a field and hearing a "low menacing growling" and being sure that a large cat was pacing behind it, in the dead of night in July 2012.

Strange vision near Macclesfield

Salt Lake Daily Telegraph May 16th 1866

A WEIRD STORY-An English correspondent relates the following weird and startling story from the interior: A very weird story is current in the hill country of Staffordshire.We have been unable to verify the narrative with anything like precision, and content ourselves with relating it as near as possible as it was told to us by a clergyman. One day last week a carrier, with his horse and cart, was taking his accustomed journey between Buxton and Macclesfield. After he had gone some distance he was accosted by a wayfaring man, who was plodding along the road, who asked for a lift. The carrier took the man up and then proceeded onward. After a while the carrier complained that his hands were cold, and asked his companion to drive for him for a time. The man consented, and took hold of the reins. Before they had gone much farther, a stranger on horseback-the horse, by the way, was a white one-overtook them, and rode by the side of the cart. A conversation was commenced, which very soon took the direction of the cattle plague. Its devastating effects were discussed, and a parallel was drawn between it and other calamaties,past and future. The stranger on horseback suddenly became prophetic, saying that next year there would be a plague or blight among the corn, which would destroy the fruits of the earth, which would be followed the next year by a plague among mankind.`Christians` ,he said, would be dead in the roadside by hundreds` -`yes`, he added, lowering his voice, and addressing the holder of the reins,`dead as the man who is sitting by your side!` The driver turned, and to his horror found that he was sitting by the side of a corpse. The stranger on horseback galloped away, and the temporary driver on the cart was left to pursue his journey with his melancholy burden-Denver News

Albino squirrel in Sussex

I paper January 25th 2021

Rare squirrel is one in 100,000

A rare albino squirrel has been spotted foraging for food in Sussex. The Forestry Commission said the condition was caused by a rare gene. In 2010,only one in 100,000 squirrels had been born albino. The albino squirrel`s white fur makes them more vulnerable to attack from predators. A website for the public to record sightings shows more than 200 have been spotted in places including Sussex,Kent,Surrey and London.

The gybgoggle

Kansas City Star January 8th,1911

From the Clinton Democrat (Lock Haven,PA) The gybgoggle is one of the rarest and most curious animals in existence and can only be found in one section of Australia and in Madagascar. It is a sort of vampire, a cross between a kangaroo and an immense bat, although unlike either of these animals in many characteristics. It stands three feet high, has a head and hoofs like a horse, with short, heavy hair covering its body, and immense wings which measure twelve feet from tip to tip. It can swim and fly with the greatest ease.

-

New species of lizard from Madagascar

The Times February 1st 2021

Tiny reptile is well equipped to deal with the mating game

"Scientists have discovered what is thought to be the smallest reptile in the world, although it has a disproportionally large penis.The cham

-eleon,called Brookesia nana, was found in a shrinking inland pocket of high-altitude montane rain-forest or cloud forest, in the north of Madagascar…"

An intelligent computer

Science Frontiers # 108,November-December 1996/ Herschbach,Dudley;"Computer Mile-stones,"Discover,17:12,October 1996

An Innovative Computer

"In SF #106 we chronicled the chess match between IBM`s Big Blue computer and human champion G.K.Kasparov.Incidental to the match itself was the fact that Big Blue sometimes made different moves when confronted with identical boards! With these denials of cyber-determinism in mind, consider the following anecdote.About 40 years ago,D.Herschbach witnessed the first test of an early chess-playing program written by the renowned S.Ulam for the MANIAC I computer.In this test, the MANIAC I computer played both sides of the board. After a rather bizarre game ,Black made a move that checkmated White.Only then did Ulam realize that the program did not say what to do when mated; it just required that a move be made to escape check. While Ulam and his colleagues debated what might happen, the computer whirred on for about ten minutes. Finally it punched out White`s move (on paper tape, then the mode).

The uncanny solution: a spurious pawn appeared and began to march down the board to become a new queen."

Comment If vacuum-tube-equipped MANIAC I was so resourceful and innovative, what might a modern super-computer "think" up? Remember HAL of 2001: A Space Odyssey and treat your own computer with respect!

Hairy Rarity

Science Frontiers # 108

November-December 1996/Bondeson,J and Miles,A.E.W.;"The Hairy Family of Burma: A Four Generation Pedigree of Congenital Hypertrichosis Lanuginosa" Royal Society of Medicine Journal 89:403,1996 Cr A.C.A. Silk

Ordinarily,we avoid two-headed snakes, six-legged calves, and the like. Sometimes biological machinery sputters a bit and freaks (terata) result, just as Detroit assembly lines turn out lemons once in a while. Occasionally, though, we come across a defect so rare and curious that we must pass it along. So,here is the Summary of a serious scientific paper...that satisfies our Fortean urge.

"A Burmese family with congenital hypertrichosis lanuginose [excessive hairiness] had an eventful history in the nineteenth century. The earlier members of this family were employed at the court of Ava,but the later ones spent their lives in show business, being widely exhibited for money in the 1800s. Their extraordinary hairiness attracted much curiosity, and they were photographed several times. The hairy Burmese are the only example of a four-generation pedigree of congenital hypertrichosis lanuginose ,which is consistent with an autosomal dominant mode of inheritance. There is good evidence that ,when members of this family were hairy, their dentition was also deficient.

Huge skeletons in South Dakota

Jackson (MI) 1894

CURIOUS DISCOVERY.

Twenty-Two Skeletons of Massive Size Found in a Tomb With Many Relics, in South Dakota.

EGAN, S. D., June 13.—A curious discovery has just been made by A. C. Hatch, of this place. For some past he has been examining a peculiar mound on a high prominence near town and his delving resulted in the finding of a tomb about ten feet square and divided into several compartments. This tomb is lined with a cement in which is a large proportion of feldspar, a quartz rock not found in this portion of the state. In these compartments were found twenty-two skeletons, many of which crumbled to pieces on being exposed to the air. Two complete skeletons and several additional skulls were exhumed, besides many curios in bronze. At one side of the tomb was also found an altar on which the supposed prehistoric race offered its sacrifice and performed its worship.

The skeletons were those of males averaging nearly eight feet in height, of massive bone, well shaped head, indicating considerable intelligence. Drs. Bryan, of this place, and Evans, of Dell Rapids, have been examining the fossil remains and bronze curios found and pronounce them of very ancient date. Further examination will be made by specialists, both of the skeletons and the tomb, and more remarkable discoveries are yet expected.

Citizen June 19th

© Geneaology Bank

Kangaroo in Surrey 1834

Hereford Times December 6th 1834

A FRIENDLY VISIT FROM A KANGAROO.—About 7 o'clock on Saturday morning, an unexpected and unwished-for visitor made his appearance, *sans ceremonie*, in the gardens at the rear of a private dwelling in Manor-place, Walworth, which excited no little consternation and alarm among the occupants. Upon a female inmate of the house opening the shutters of the kitchen window, which looks directly into the garden, she was suddenly amazed at beholding a kangaroo staring her full in the face. Terrified at the appearance of this very strange animal, she gave the alarm, at the noise of which the kangaroo retreated a few steps, and took his stand upon a strawberry-bed. After gazing at the affrighted girl for a few seconds, he took a leap over the adjoining gardens, and made his exit. It is supposed that he had effected his escape from the neighbouring Surrey Zoological Gardens.

© British Newspaper Archive

letters and e-mails

Parakeets in Britain?

Daily Telegraph December 2nd 2020

(Thanks to Richard George for sending me this.)

Medieval parakeet

Sir-I looked up the "wodewoses" (mythical wildmen)depicted in the Sherborne Missal (report,November 30)and found them fascinating,but what struck me as just as interesting was the bright green ring -necked parakeet at the top of the page.

All the other birds are instantly recognisable,so this is not some mythical bird of the artist`s imagination.Were there ring-necked parakeets living wild in this country(ie Britain-Richard) 600 years ago?

Georgina Johnson,Beccles,Suffolk,

More on lions in Worcestershire

E-mail from Carl Marshall to Bob Skinner on lions in Worcestershire .December 11th 2020. See Flying Snake 18.

Hello Bob,

My father told me the story. He used to do taxidermy for a very wealthy gentleman who was living at the property named Kenneth Barrum.

Mr Barrum was told the story by an old groundskeeper (I think), who showed him what he claimed were the old rundown enclosures (or some structures along those lines) said to be used (or not, if the story is true) by the cats. Mr Barrum told my father the story while he was showing him round the grounds, and if I remember correctly, showed him the so called enclosures which were apparently still there. As for the dates, I'm not sure when my father was told the story, I will ask him tomorrow if he remembers.

I seem to remember back in 2011 when I originally interviewed my father about this for Richard, he was basically guessing the date when the lions were allegedly there, as he was trying to remember what Mr Barrum had told him only briefly many years before (at least the 1990s but possibly before, again I will ask again tomorrow), and there is no way now of knowing exactly when the groundskeeper originally told Mr Barrum, or if he was even being truthful.

All I can guarantee is that my father doesn't make things up and if he says Mr Barrum told him this and let him see the obviously unusual and rundown structures, then at the very least the buildings were there, and this was the story associated with them as told by one of the then occupants. I think the Court had been made into apartments or something.

And being a (then) well known professional taxidermist and a fine naturalist (you would be surprised how many so called taxidermists know nothing of anatomy or morphology) he is not the gullible kind. My father also seems to respect Mr Barrum, considering him trustworthy and not the sort to even embellish facts let alone lie. So, as far as I'm concerned Mr Barrum was being truthful, in that he believed the story as it had been told to him, and related to my father. As for the old groundskeeper... ?I will double check the details and let you know if I have remembered anything wrong or forgotten anything

E-mail from Richard George January 6th 2021 (See article on Enigmatic Bird and Thomas Hardy novel)

Hope all's OK with you in Lockdown 3. (Is it 3 - I've lost count !)

I had a look at the Cream Coloured Courser online. According to

thedeskboundbirder.blogspot.com/2014/07/,

there were 45 UK records up to the end of 2012, but only eight of those since 1950. Two recent sightings are; Scilly Isles Sept/Oct 2004 (a long-staying bird later found dead), and May 2012 on Bradnor Hill, Herefordshire.

Sticking with birds...

My letter to *Fortean Times about the "German penguin" (i.e., I think, Razorbill), was published.*

There's an article online you might be interested in about the Centurion Club, birds which haven't been recorded in the UK for a hundred years. It's birdguides.com/articles/britain-ireland/

One bird that was in the Centurion Club until recently was Tengmalm`s Owl with its funny eyebrow-raise facial disk (it always reminds me, this bird, of dear Greta Thunberg) One`s taken up residence in the Shetlands.

Another very interesting bird that's still in the club is Pallas's Gull, aka the Great Black-Headed Gull, a very large and striking species that lives in Transcaspia. The only accredited UK sighting is from 1859, and that's because it was shot and stuffed. It's in the museum in Exeter. There have been several other alleged sightings, dealt with by Vinicombe and Hopkin in *British Birds 86 (5).*

Exeter is Jonathan Downes territory, speaking of whom... there's an account in the latest FT of people having a frightening psilocybin experience on a hill in that part of the world which reminds me very much of his *Monster Hunter page 40 and following. Stuck record in the sky ?*

All the best, and hoping for a shot in the arm (literally),

Richard

P.S. I'm sending you a couple of photos of the countryside around Potters Crouch near St Albans where they've had ABC sightings. (Sadly there was not enough room in this issue to produce them-Dr Devo.)

Letters to Fate

Thanks to Gary Mangiacopra for this information

Volume 10, Number 10,Issue Number 91 , October 1957

VISION ACROSS SPACE

Sallie A.Cooper

Port Credit,Ontario

Canada

OUR SON was stationed in Karachi,India(sic) in 1944,during World War II. While there he became engaged to a British war nurse. He wrote that they were planning to be married when he got his 10 days leave; probably in two month`s time.

One night the following week, I had a vision in which I saw the wedding take place. Every detail was clear. My son was wearing an unfamiliar uniform. His bride, her dress, hat and flowers, were as real as if I stood near her. In the morning I told my husband and the housekeeper what I had seen.

Less than 24 hours later a telegram came from my son. His leave of absence had come unexpectedly .He was to be transferred to England at expiration of leave. The marriage had taken place, and at the time I saw it.

I wrote describing his uniform and the bridal outfit ;which I saw as an ice-blue color. My son wrote that my vision had been correct in every detail. His uniform was a new one that had just been issued by the Air Force. Although I had never seen the bride, nor a picture of her, I had described her perfectly. Later,the wedding pictures arrived, confirming what I had seen.

Volume 10,Number 9,Issue number 90,September 1957

TERRIFYING DREAM COME TRUE

By Aaron H.Downer

In December,1956,10-yearold Keith Gilbert,of St.Johns,Newfoundland,Canada,was a patient in a tuberculosis sanitorium. On Christmas Eve he woke up screaming. The night nurse hurried over to him and he sobbingly explained that he had had a "terrible dream". He could not recall what it was but it left him so upset that a nurse had to stay at his bedside the rest of the night.

In the morning hospital staff members had the sad duty of telling Keith that his father, R.C.M.P. Constable Clayton Gilbert had been killed during the night in an automobile accident at Brookfield Bridge.

Keith`s dream and his father`s death had occurred at about the same time.

Volume 11,Number 4,Issue number 97,April 1958

HOLE IN THE GROUND

There was a heck of a big explosion one day early in December at the farm of William Blackburn,12 miles northeast of Red Bay,Alabama. When Blackburn went out to investigate he found a hole in the ground about 48 feet long, three to four feet wide and waist deep. Nearby were three smaller holes six to eight feet in diameter and two to three feet deep.

Deputy Sheriff Aubrey Patterson who examined the area thoroughly

found that a barbed wire fence had been snapped in several places and the double wire of one strand appeared to be fused together –as if by heat.

Patterson and Blackburn thought at first the holes had been caused by lightning ,but since the day had been clear they ruled that out. Patterson didn`t believe the holes had been caused by dynamite-they were the wrong shape and dynamite wouldn`t be likely to fuse wires. Large pieces of sandstone had been thrown out of the biggest hole for a distance of 40 feet or more.

Blackburn described the noise as being like a "big explosion" with a "long roar to it."

Experts from Third Army headquarters at Atlanta came out to look at Blackburn`s holes. They reported "there is absolutely no evidence that anything dropped from either outer or inner space" to make the holes. They said the holes were apparently caused by lightning.

For our part, we don`t believe it.

Volume 10,Number 6,Issue number 87,June 1957

THE VIKINGS OF NIPIGON

On May 24,1930,James Dodd, a prospector and railroad worker reported finding on the shore of Lake Nipigon in Canada historic remains which seemed to prove that Vikings had visited this section of North America.

While dynamiting for gold near Beardmore,Dodd said he turned up the relics among the roots of a tree. They consisted of the remains of a sword, a rattle and an axhead.

For a quarter of a century the Beardmore relics were accepted as evidence that Northmen penetrated the heart of North America 1,000 years ago. Now the Royal Ontario Museum has reopened the whole case and has launched intensive studies of the find. Dr A.D.

Tushingham , director of the museum`s division of archaeology, wants answers to two questions:

1. Are the relics genuine?
2. Were they carried to the site by a true Viking or were they planted there?

A field force of archaeologists and scientists will go to the site of the discovery in the late spring—as soon as the ground has thawed sufficiently to excavate. Fresh affidavits are being taken from persons still living who have first-hand knowledge of the circumstances. Dodd himself is dead.

The relics, meanwhile, are being subjected to spectrographic ,x-ray and analytical chemical tests. Swedish scientists are being asked to supply data. Two ancient Viking swords are being studied for comparison; one was found in the River Thames in England,the other in the River Seine in France.

For those who wonder about it, the rattle appears to be a talisman, known as a rangel,which many Norsemen carried.

"If we can establish beyond reasonable doubt that both the relics and the site are genuine then we shall have proof that the Norsemen explored thousands of miles farther to the south and west in North America than their routes are at present known," Dr Tushingham told the North Newspaper Alliance.

Volume 10,Number 6,Issue number 87,June 1957

RING OF STEEL

"Leadabrand also reports this story. Does anyone have information as to its truth?

He says that an acquaintance told him that there exists in Sweden a gigantic steel ring about a mile in diameter, about two feet thick and four feet high, protruding out of the earth atop a mountain. After thousands of years ,the ring is unrusted and uncorroded.

Within the ring, it is reported grow kinds of shrubbery not seen anywhere else in the vicinity –possibly not in the world. Sounds like a fairy tale. But if true, no lathe the earth ever saw or ever will see turned out such a ring. "

Volume 10,Number 6,Issue number 87, June 1957

WEEPING,BLEEDING STATUES

At opposite end of the nation, recently, strange things happened to religious statues. In January a cedarwood Madonna in a small art gallery in Sausalito,California,across the bay from San Francisco,began to "weep".

According to Mrs.Frances Needham of the Martin Art Gallery,an elderly man on crutches viewed Madonna for some time ,then asked permission to kiss it.

About two hours later Mrs.Needham noticed a thin yellowish fluid was flowing from the statues right eye. Mrs Clara Bass,who carved the Madonna,believes that the tears may have been resin from a pocket in the wood which flowed because of the room`s heat. Regardless, visitors soon began to pour into the art gallery for spiritual aid from the

weeping madonna.

Across the nation-in Brooklyn,New York-tears formed in the right eye and blood dripped from the hands of a statue of Christ in the home of Jose Luis Incarnacion,at 201 Seigel Street.More than 5,000 persons trooped through the house in a two-day period in February. " I was lighting a candle in front of the statue," Incarnacion explained. "Suddenly I saw a tear form in the right eye of the statue. "Almost at the same time I saw the wounds of Christ`s hands start bleeding. Then I saw the wounds get bigger and bigger…"

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SOMETHING NEW ON MARS

It takes a long time for astronomical observations to get out. For instance, on June 3rd,1956,Robert S.Richardson was peering through the 60-inch Mt.Wilson telescope.

In February,1957,the Astronomical Society of the Pacific got around to publishing his observations. Then the Associated Press picked up the yarn and shot it around the U.S. in minutes.

What Richardson saw was a network of irregular blue lines running through the bright red areas of the planet Mars. The observation was fleeting and Richardson noted several other details as the planet approached the earth but he did not see the strange blue lines again.

They were probably canals, Richardson reports. But they were different from the long, straight lines heretofore seen by astronomers.